ゼロの使い魔 18

〈滅亡の精霊石〉

ヤマグチノボル

MF文庫 J

Novel Illustrations

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や-01-23

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MEDIA FACTORY
580

9784840131537

ISBN978-4-8401-3153-7
C0193 ¥580E

1920193005806

定価：本体580円（税別）
メディアファクトリー
MEDIA FACTORY

ゼロの使い魔18　滅亡の精霊石

才人の元に戻ってきたルイズは、才人に素直な気持ちを告げる。「会えないときは、いっつもあなたのことばかり考えてるの」それは、たくさん考えた末に、それでも才人と一緒にいたいと願う言葉だった。二人は初めてはっきりと気持ちを通わせあい、幸せにひたる。同時に、ルイズはハルケギニアを救うため、ロマリアの野望を止めることを決意した。二人はアンリエッタたちと協力し、まずはタバサを救い出して、再び王座にすえようと動き始めるのだが……。とどまるところを知らない無敵のラブコメファンタジー、ラブ分多め、ドラマチック増量でお届けする待望の18巻！

【著者】

ヤマグチノボル

やまぐち・のぼる

1972年2月、茨城県生まれ。『カナリア～この想いを歌にのせて』（角川スニーカー文庫）でデビュー。代表作『ゼロの使い魔』シリーズのほか、角川スニーカー文庫や富士見ファンタジア文庫でも著書多数。近刊は『烈風の騎士姫』（MF文庫J）。
近況：渚をドライブしたいです。
ブログ→http://hexagon-noboru.blogspot.com/

【イラストレーター】

兎塚エイジ

うさつか・えいじ

8月16日生まれ。大阪を拠点に活動中のイラストレーター。『ゼロの使い魔』シリーズ（MF文庫J）『神曲奏界ポリフォニカ　ぶるう』シリーズ（GA文庫）等のライトノベルをはじめ、PCゲーム『ANGEL MAGISTER』（mana）では原画を担当。初のイラスト集「兎塚エイジ Zero ゼロの使い魔イラストコレクション」（メディアファクトリー）も好評発売中。
最近は同人活動にも積極的に参加しています。
更新の少ない運営ブログは「DO-RAKU7」で検索!

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〈滅亡の精霊石〉

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才人があわあわとするうちに、
ルイズは肩から修道服を脱いだ。
するっと、丸い輪になって、
修道服がルイズの足もとに滑り落ちる。
シュミーズ姿のルイズが月明かりに浮かび、
才人は思わず目をそらした。

ジュリオの踊りを見ていると、
ジョゼットの心の中に、
暖かい何かが満ちていった。
徐々にうきうきと、心が弾んでいくのがわかる。

ジュリオ
ロマリア教皇ヴィットーリオの使い魔。ジョゼットを操っている。
才人
ルイズの使い魔。現在は水精霊騎士隊の副隊長もつとめる。
ルイズ
才人のご主人様で、虚無の担い手の少女。なかなか自分の気持ちに素直になれなかったが……？
ジョゼット
タバサの双子の妹。ジュリオのことが好き。
アンリエッタ
トリステイン王国の女王。ルイズとは幼馴染み。

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Chapter 1 – Lovers

Location: Capital of Gallia, Lutetia, in the courtyard of the palace of Versailles located in the suburbs of the capital, in a camp where a huge amount of tents were erected.

Inside one of these tents, in a small canvas tent with dark blue peak and three supports, was where Saito and Louise were kissing.

Saito, only some few hours ago, had been miraculously rescued by the timely intervention of Louise in his battle against Jack, one of the ’Elemental Siblings’, and now he was lost in a dream as his lips lay next to her, while strongly embracing her sweet little body.

After several weeks of not seeing her, it was expected that the love that radiates from them were to overflow uncontrollably. Yet no matter how strong it is, Louise’s frustration hadn't been dissipated.

In silence, while still wearing the habit that she always wore during her stay in Saint Margarita, Louise offered no resistance as Saito carried her in his arms.

Then without thinking, Saito stretched his hand to reach the small chest of Louise, in doing so, Louise waved his hand gently in response.

“Sorry... for not treating you well, sorry for being so selfish.“ After restraining, Saito cleared his mind and finally released her little body.

Apparently the issue on which Louise looked on, the scene of Saito and Henrietta kissing, had finally disappeared. Although it seemed that Louise was willing to forgive him, it was clear that trying to ignore the issue as it never happened was a bad idea.

Louise then just stared at Saito with those beautiful reddish brown eyes, a little embarrassed by what she was doing, thinking her body was little. However,

looking at those deep eyes, one could not see any anger or reproach.

After watching for a few moments, Louise glanced toward the habit she worn for so long, it had remained in her body from the moment she decided to escape from the convent of Saint Margarita.

Because that was all she had worn throughout her journey and even in her battle against Jack, it was expected that it was already quite dirty.

Then Louise gave a little sigh. "Hauu" then resolutely said:

“I would like to take a walk.”

At the moment they left the tent, they saw the light of the two moons shining in the sky.

The courtyard of the palace of Versailles that Louise and Saito left was dimly lit because of the various campfires burning in that place. The courtyard is flooded with tents as small as that of Saito’s but these could contain up to 10 people. All the guests that were staying here are from various nations whose status was noble or little renown soldiers.

The atmosphere was still high because of the party that was still being held in the garden to celebrate the coronation of the new Queen of Gallia. Despite the congestion due to such events, Louise made her way swiftly among all that sea of tents, with speed and firm.

But it seemed that Saito did not share her ability to move, as he quickly fell behind unable to keep pace with Louise.

“Where are we going?“ Saito asked, but received no response.

It seemed as if they were taking the walk, but with no particular destination.

The land occupied by the court of Versailles were broad enough to allow a walk, this was of a size comparable to a large avenue, then they realized they had gone enough from the tumult of tents.

The place they arrived was located between a large number of plants with flowering shrubs. Because it is the month of Ansuul (August), the heat had

reached its highest point this year.

Despite being at night, the heat in the atmosphere wiped the surrounding air. This place, full of boxes, was devoid of any nearby fire to light their way, thus, leaving the moonlight to guide their steps.

Then suddenly, the two heard a faint sound of water flowing from somewhere nearby, approaching the source of the sound, they found a great source of water(fountain).

Immediately, Louise approached and sit right next to it while crossing her legs, then set her sights on the sky. Then as if murmuring she said:

“I've been thinking about the past events.”

That will be what Louise wants to say, *perhaps she decided that I can no longer stand by her, really, will you she able to say that?*

An indescribable anxiety invaded Saito. However, it only terrified Saito for a few seconds.

Then from Louise's face came an expression as if at last all the thoughts that filled in her head had been put in order, having done that, the words began to come out from her mouth:

“Um , From the time I spend away from you, I got to think about a lot of things seriously. I thought I could just forget everything by not thinking about it, not thinking about sad and difficult things, but at the end of the day I realized what I was doing was just to escape the unpleasant things that were happening, the difficult things I didn’t want to face...”

From this point, Louise stopped for a moment and stared at her right hand.

“But, after all that is just cowardice no matter how painful it is that I felt my heart will break. However, within me there is a great power, there are people who need that power, however I ... I ran away trying to pretend not knowing it.”

That is... what I came to think... Louise added.

“Right.” Saito nodded.

The instant Louise fled, he had realized it. He realized the cowardice that lay within him. But now his determination was back, Louise had gained strength thanks to it, I had to give her an answer.

He had lost to his own desires, which caused his betrayal of Louise.

“I ... as I dare to kiss you knowing that I am so unworthy ... I could not help falling into a lust and lose control of my actions... forgive me.“ Saito said while bowing his deeply, this gesture provoked Louise's gaze on him. But Louise could all do was to show her tired face with a bitter smile.

“Yes you did, I thought the same thing many times, why is it that this person tries so hard to make me suffer forever, at that time the anger fills my head, all I want to do is to throw a punch and then run, but you know, since I'm also tired of it, and that's why, from now on you can do whatever you want!”

Those words were her final verdict. Then Saito felt as if a hammer hit him directly in his head, this time depression has filled his face... he knew that he would be disrespecting Louise, he will never escape the fate held in the tent.

“ ... What I want to do ... is only able to be by your side. But, I stupidly couldn’t keep my faithfulness to you ... So just treat me, even, like a familiar. That would be enough for me, so ... “ Saito could say no more, the words had stuck in his throat. Seeing that, Louise did not hesitate and rush him to finish what he was saying.

“So, ‘and therefore,’ What?”

“If you ever got here to have another lover, I'll still protect you as a familiar… I am ... so ... but I'm saying, if from the start I have been more than just your familiar...”

After hearing this, the expression of Louise could no longer just listen without saying anything.

“Hey you! Listen, you could stop and stick with that, you, if I were to have a lover, I promise you I will not ask you anymore to risk your life to save me!”

“Huh? That’s silly! I’ll still save you!”

“So yes, I know, you're a man with the pure sense of duty you are ready to save me if I needed it, no matter whether you’re my lover or not.”

“Ce ... Certainly!”

“I do not know if I’ll still say this, but literally, you have always been there to save me, no matter how selfish or rude I have been to you. You even got to risk your life for me, and yet, knowing this, I have been so abusive to you ... always hitting and punishing you, and worst of all, was when I ran away just like that without saying anything ... making everyone worry about me ... and, and, and so ... I think we're even!--”

Louise gave a little sigh, then continue talking.

“--If I’ll have a lover you say? If I wanted to have a lover then I'll had one a long time ago. But if I did, will you feel painful too? Will it make you angry? Tell me, will you abandon me too?

“...Abandon? You?”

“Yes, really, when you kissed me, my head was totally blank. All the time that I could be with you, all I did was to think of you, also if I am asleep, you always appeared in my dreams, why? I come to wonder, is it because you're my familiar? Why are you always there to rescue me? How many times that you told me you loved me? or all the times you strongly embrace me? or all those kisses you gave me?”

The more Louise talks, the more surprised Saito was. He couldn't remain still. Even Louise didn’t want to hear what Saito has to say. So without any movement, he was only able to continue listening to what she had to say.

“There might be something else, or it might be everything, however it was no longer important to me. That's the conclusion I reached after thinking so much, it's so frustrating but ... that's the truth. No matter how angry I was, I still realized that! And that's why I told you to do what you want! I, no matter what you do, how I feel about you will not change at all!”

After she had said that, Louise began to mutter something to Saito that he could barely understand. By listening carefully:

"Oh God, in truth I'm a fool, as you may have come to believe in my words... although I cannot deny that everything I said is true ... but I already said that this, as I'll finish this well, I admit my defeat so easily, but I think this has nothing to do with winning or losing, so I think you win..."

Seeing Louise watching him with those muttering eyes, Saito could not help but feel really moved.

Louise ... Is what you feel for me true...? Ahh ... So this is the result of putting my life to the danger ...

So what's the next thing I have to say to her? Do I have to look away and run? But that's nonsense!

There is no justification to that pitiful action, I shouldn't do this to her. I must not make fun of what she said!

Louise's words sum up in simple but serious words: *No matter what happens, my feelings for you will never change.*

Overwhelmed by his own weakness, Saito got to think about all the times he betrayed this girl.

How is she lost to all her affection for me? How is it possible that all the feelings that I ever have in her have not been processed in vain?

But with the words that Louise said a moment ago, Saito was lost and didn't know what to answer.

And ... I ...

He knew he had to say something, but no words came out of his mouth.

That's it.

I have to say clearly the reasons why I love her.

Saito then took a deep breath and look in the eyes of Louise.

“Um, can I say something?"

“Huh?“ Louise could only returned a puzzled look at Saito.

“I will try to be as honest as possible until the end.”

“What's with this "until the end", it was so nasty!”

“Do not say nasty, but aren't you the one who still accepted me even after being so nasty?”

“Yes, you're right, especially when you say you're nasty!”

“Sor ... sorry, but could you be quiet while I'm talking, because really, I ... maybe this sounds a little weird but, every time I see you, it's like you are transporting me to a different world ... this ... because that's the way you make me feel. Towards an exciting place, to a distant place that is maybe not here. It is a special place that is beyond all good and evil, that's for sure. You opened my eyes and led me through those places that up till now have been unknown to me. Yes, and they were all equally precious, no matter how hard they have been on some occasions, nor the sadness that sometimes I feel, even in the times when I truly believed that my life was slipping through my hands, all were equally important. But, all the happy times we pass along have been the most precious part you'll ever have in my life, and that's the truth.”

“Hey! Stop talking nonsense! I give you permission to leave aside the compliments!”

“No way they are nonsense! Well, if I were being totally honest, you would have been a little upset.”

“Then I'll punch you!”

“But honestly, the majority of what I felt were funny moments. Yes, those moments that made my heart tremble! And believe me I would never lie about this, the one who is able to trigger these feelings inside me, it's you! I feel like if you were able to take me to a special place other than this.”

Then Louise stared Saito and give him a cold stare.

“Surely, the Princess also made your heart tremble right?”

“No, she didn’t...” Said Saito as a cold sweat ran down his body.

“Always telling lies, you know, I still remember that face you made when you kissed her huh?”

Indeed it seemed that Louise was remembering the time she saw them kissing, as her small shoulders began to shake with anger. Also after giving a little "Hoa" she exhaled, almost at the same time one of her legs got up, which caused by reflex, Saito inclined to protect himself from a possible attack.

However, the kick that always came flying on these occasions, has not landed.

Seeing Louise raised leg in the air, she could only think "you're hopeless swordsman" as she shook her head and then lower her leg back to its original position.

“Aren’t you going to kick?”

“I'm not going to kick you for being honest, say, were you moved? When you kissed the Princess?”

Saito under her gaze without a second thought raise his head and took a deep breath.

“Uh, a bit.”

Louise's leg rose once again in the air, seeing this Saito seemed prepared for the consequences of what he said, and before crying, he scream to answer the question of Louise.

“Ye-, yes, I was moved during the kiss! It was amazing!”

Louise's entire body began to shake as if a wave, then lift the other leg and began to move in the air, it was really as if preparing to launch a countless number of kicks, but eventually Louise could somehow contain her anger.

“The moment I kick you, that would be your end!“ While muttering this, Louise set her legs once again to the floor.

“Well, it seems that I cannot blame the Princess, for this useless sensuality is

revealed only after becoming an adult, and what it's for...”

“Louise ...” Saito said her name while cold sweats ran down his body, it seemed to never stop. And then Louise looks at him, Saito couldn’t escape from that icy stare.

“Ahhh, I decided I won’t be bothered by that. All those little things will just stacked up one after another, being angry about that is just a waste of energy.”

After saying this, Louise then began to approach gradually the place where Saito was; extend both her hands and with her little palms try to wrap his face.

“But you’re not going to forget that I am the most important of all.”

“Of course!" Without thinking, Saito approached her face and tried to kiss Louise, but she promptly did everything possible to get away from those lips.

With a worried face Saito tried to ask what happened:

“Louise? " Then, Louise trying to apologize, issued a few words that left him surprised.

“Um, um, I.. , I would like to take a bath.”

“Huh? Bath??”

As if he did not understand those words, Saito replied to a request from Louise.

Seeing him respond this way, Louise try to say it again, in the most clear as possible.

“I said right now I want to take a bath.” This is what Louise said quietly, but with a strong determination that was evident from her tone.

“A bath... but why now?”

“Well, since I left Saint Margarita, I couldn’t bath even once, and see ... I've sweated and also this is the only clothes I've been wearing ...”

“B-, but ... Taking a bath at this hour? ...?”

In the guest house she could prepare a bath, but at this hour of the morning I see it very unlikely, after thinking about this, what happened next was a new declaration of Louise that was surprising.

“But here's a place I can take a bath. See? Just look at the shining water as it flows.“ What Louise was pointing at the time, was the source of water who was right in front of them.

“Ehh, but we do not know where this water come from? Really, think about it...?”

“Huh, what's wrong, it's not as if it was dirty water, and we're in summer.” With that, determined, Louise took in her hands the bottom of the habit to start undressing.

“Tsk! Hey! We're practically in the street.”

“It’s alright, as we are totally in the dark, and I don’t hear anyone who is walking around. If someone is watching us now, those would be the moons.”

The situation had become just as he heard, perhaps the reason that Louise had brought him to this place was precisely for this, that was the idea born in the mind of Saito.

As she walked, she seemed impatient for something as she looked everywhere ... So what she was looking for ...It was a fountain!

Still lost in his rambling, Saito did not realize what time Louise had completely withdrawn the habit on her shoulders. But then he realized, with eyes wide open, as the habit he envision that until recently she was wearing, lay thrown at the feet of Louise.

The figure of Louise wearing only her underwear seemed to float while being illuminated by the soft light of the moon, then without thinking, Saito looked away from that beautiful vision.

“Eeh, hey you ...”

Immediately without receiving a doubt, a faint sound of clothing rubbing began to resonate. Then from that point, he could hear the sound of water churning

"Chapun" because those little bare feet had entered the water.

“This is cold, but it feels good.”

“As you say, but hurry!” Saito said as he turned his head not to look. He was almost about to give-in to the temptation to look but if he were to see that white and smooth skin of her this time, he would no longer contain his instincts.

In the past, Louise showed no doubts about changing clothes in front of Saito but ... so far he got an opportunity like this, a chance to see directly her beautiful skin.

Anxiety grows almost unbearable within Saito, and at that time a new declaration of Louise, a wonderful in fact could be heard by Saito:

“Could you wash my back?”

“B, b, b but...”

...really can I? Did you mean it?

“Bu-, but you are not allowed to touch everywhere except my back, ok?” Louise said with a slight tone of anger in her voice.

At that moment Saito was dumbstruck. Louise, found the fountain, sat there and put her back right in front of him. He could see a little white light glowing on her back because of the moonlight. The beautiful line of her body was seen as a mirage of dreams within the intense summer heat.

Truly tiny, but the uncontrollable heart throb of Saito proved that he knew very well that this little back was full of a strange and intoxicating sensuality.

Without thinking, Saito suddenly began to gulp. Saito couldn’t stand it, but he held it some way and then went along taking his first step.

From edge of the fountain he took off his shoes and then roll up his jeans. Then yet hesitantly, he prepared to enter into the water, and there, looking down, the beautiful back of Louise was finally within the reach of his hand.

Her long pink hair was separated in two from her neck, and then dropped on her

shoulders. They were tinged with a lovely hue. Oh, no matter how many time I've hugged Louise, this ... this feeling of touching her skin directly is a rare opportunity.

Saito slowly extended his arm, until he finally touch the back of Louise.

The feeling of touching her skin with his hand makes his entire body tremble.

It was smooth and warm. The experience of playing this delicate naked body caused Saito's mind to give a strong impression, and the certainty of "I was really alive", "This is the person I loved " He was experiencing the strongest feeling of love that he never felt before.

After letting the water run over the back of Louise, he prepared to wash her back, at the time when Saito began to move his hand, he could not help but feel a small tremor from Louise's body.

Saito felt as if his throat was completely dry, from this point, if he only stretch out his hand, if he only stretch a little more ... that soft part of the body of Louise ... indeed at this time any part of the body of Louise was within the reach of his hand.

But then, Saito, *was it worth having this great opportunity?* He who betrayed Louise, *Did I really had the right to even touch her, to feel it with my dirty hands and warm her beautiful naked body?* That's what Saito thought at this time.

Funnh, Feeling Saito's hand stopped, Louise seemed to have realized the fault whipping of Saito's heart, then a desolate air reach to whisper a few words:

“Hey Saito!”

“M, m, Ye? Yes?”

“Do, I ... Do I look pretty? “ It was very smooth, a sound so softly that her voice seemed to fade, but still, he could perfectly understand what she said.

“Yes, of course you do!” Saito said this almost without thinking, Louise slowly stood up before him.

“Ohh! Ohio! Hey you! Wait!” Saito could not be more confused, but what the hell was Louise thinking? Really it was a mystery that totally exceeded Saito's mind.

But one thing was clear to him, he certainly understand though that the world was crumbling before his eyes, was at this very moment, his beloved Louise was right in front of him, as God brought the world.

“Tell me, do you think I am more beautiful than Princess?" Louise ask this in a calm voice.

“Yes... because, I have never seen the princess look this beautiful...”

“Tell me, do you think I am more beautiful than Siesta?”

“Well, I have not been able to see Siesta look this pretty.”

“Is that so, good!”

“Oh, Ohi ...”

Then Saito without having a moment to prepare his heart, he saw Louise suddenly turned around him.

If I see her I’ll die.

Saito really thought he would die if he did it, but this idea was not enough for him to look away.

What he saw was something that just had appeared in his dreams, he was finally in front of her. The glory to see the beautiful naked body of his beloved Louise.

“.....”

The moonlight was dim, but this was enough to stain an amazing shine to Louise’s naked body. The light illuminating her small chest gently makes its way to be the volumes never seen before. From the delicate curves from which they were born until to these delicate points from which they ended, *I could say that it was the most beautiful view of the universe.*

And even the body of Louise from under her navel, though blurred by a faint shadow, was still a part that had not escaped the view of Saito, who at that time could spot absolutely everything.

“Louise ... “ Then in a voice that seemed to reveal that a great weight had been taken off her shoulders Louise said:

“Stop, stop thinking things, don't you realize that this is my gift for you, really,

really, all I said were things I wanted to say but the truth, what you’re doing is also what I wanted do, like when you kissed me I also wanted to kiss you, or when you push me, I also wanted you to do it, but I was so embarrassed to ask you, so I did not."

Then Louise lifted her face and stared at Saito.

“You also have to show me....”

Saito nodded at her request while putting a really serious face, and then begin to put off his cloak, his sweatshirt, his pants and finally his underwear: all of which he put aside on the edge of the fountain.

Then they both looked at each other in the same way as they had come into the world, at that time it was a little hard to stretch their arms in order to reach each other, but still they ended up in a hard hug.

“I...”

“What?”

“I, I feel like I was born only for this moment.“ Saito said the most serious voice he could, a voice would yet full of warmth.

It was something mysterious, as at this time the atmosphere had become calm, then from her breast a feeling of total peace flooded the whole body of Saito.

“I feel the same Saito.” For a brief moment the two held each other in that way, as if murmuring when Louise said:

“Saito, Hey, you know, I have a favor to ask.”

“What?”

“You know, I do not mind you seeing other women, or even do this with one of them but ...”

“But?”

“Please do not die before me, please promise me only that, I will surely could

never endure the fact that you're not by my side.”

“That's just what I would say." Saito also said: “Never mind you kissing other men, no matter what you do to them, but please, never dare to die before me.”

“Well, then when we die, let's be together. “ Saito slowly lift her chin, and Louise dutifully did it, then as they closed their eyes, the two joined their lips.

After a long kiss, Louise began to feel in her hips an unpleasant feeling, then when she look to see what it was, she could see that thing. Her face flushed completely, but with a face full of commitment she said:

“...Do we have do it?”

Then for a moment she saw Saito put a face with pain as he bit his lip forcefully, and immediately Saito show a smile on his face.

“No, that's fine.”

“ ... You do not want to do it? but, you are a man and ...”

“ ... And, uh, obviously I want to. But, it's too soon, at the moment there are lots of things I should do before ... and also ...”

“And also?”

“We will do it... once we're married.”

Then Louise looked away as if embarrassed and then painfully muttered:

“Thank you.”

The two set out to leave the water and dress again. Then the hot, dry summer weather of Halkeginia almost immediately dry their bodies.

Preparing to return, Saito reached out to Louise and she gladly accept it.

“Hey Saito, I may have said just a while ago but I think if I cheat you you’ll be mad too, Right?.”

“That's normal, you know, if you get to fool me, I will not forgive you.”

“After everything you've done you dare to say such things. “ Louise said slightly annoyed tone, but this seemed to be nothing to worry about.

Then Louise moved closer to Saito and as they walked together they finally return to their tent.

Full happiness invaded Saito as he observed Louise in his arm.

Then at that time.

Suddenly.

Indeed suddenly.

A feeling inside Saito was born.

Louise is back. And told me she trust me to take care of everything.

I am extremely happy. But ...

Now I have everything I want in the world, This is the feeling I never had before in my life.

What is this? Then Louise noticed the strange expression of Saito.

“... Is something wrong?”

“No ... It's just that ... “ Then as he left his thoughts Saito observed Louise which seemed to have a really worried face.

“But you're all pale.”

“No, really, it's nothing.”

The moonlight illuminated them both gently as his figure mysteriously glow.

Chapter 2 - Fouquet and Wardes

Location: Capital of the Imperial Alliance, Romalia.

The streets of Romalia were carefully organized, well aligned that they resembled a Go Board. A figure of a woman could be seen walking hurriedly through them.

Her long dark-green hair on her forehead was split right down through the middle, behind her glasses was a glimpse of a glimmering intellect, her serious expression was enough to judge that she was prepared to face the commotion on these streets.

She wore a dark blue blouse accompanied with a white skirt, and in her arms she was carrying a lot of books that came from somewhere. Seeing her, at first glance, she looked like a secretary of a local noble.

However, even despite her casual way of walking, the woman always kept her guard up while keeping a watchful eye on her surroundings.

Right now, the city of Romalia was wrapped in the chaos because The Pope, St. Aegis the 32nd, had rallied his people to gather their weapons and continue in their duty to engage in the crusade.

It was a huge campaign that would not end until the holy land was recovered from the hands of the elves.

Walking through the streets of Romalia, one could see, as they were everywhere, posters plastered to the walls that called on people to join voluntarily as soldiers for the Crusade. These panels had the slogan "Your duty is to annihilate the heretics!(elves)".

The cavalry of the Church could be seen parading down the main street in long lines, orderly organized with respect to ranks of the troops.

Any priest who saw the parade held by Order of Knights, had to stop before them, show a sign of cross and offer his blessing.

Inside the big fuss of that place, the woman with casual steps walked for a few moments as the tension seemed to start to invade her body, then she continued her path until she came to a dead end.

This is a place where the country of Romalia could not extend its light.

In the corners, dirty water and food waste accumulated which produced an indescribable stench. Along the street, could be seen here and there with a disheveled and unkempt appearance, children refugees from different nations of Halkeginia. They sat there as if waiting for some uncertain event in this place that seemed to be hidden even in the eyes of God.

Then, as the woman began to walk along this street, it created an eerie effect in the children who suddenly rose after watching this young woman with a twinkle of excitement in their eyes.

“Onee-chan! Onee-chan!”

Then after hearing this, the woman started to pull out from her pocket a few copper coins which she give to the children who hurriedly approached her. The children came one after another here and there, gathering around about ten of them, they tried to decide the order in which they would receive the coins and started to fight around her.

"...Hey, there's enough for everyone, so do not fight, and do not even try to steal the coins of others.”

With money in hand, the children began to move away happy with the gift, meanwhile the woman watched them from her eyes that remained narrowed.

As the children left, she began to make sure that no one was left around, then she prepare to enter a collapsed building in which the façade plaster was falling apart.

After entering the lobby of this building, she found some stairs leading to the second floor, and climbed them.

Being on the second floor the first thing that was obvious was a hallway with lots of doors uniformly arranged one behind the other, when you saw this place it seemed to be an old apartment building.

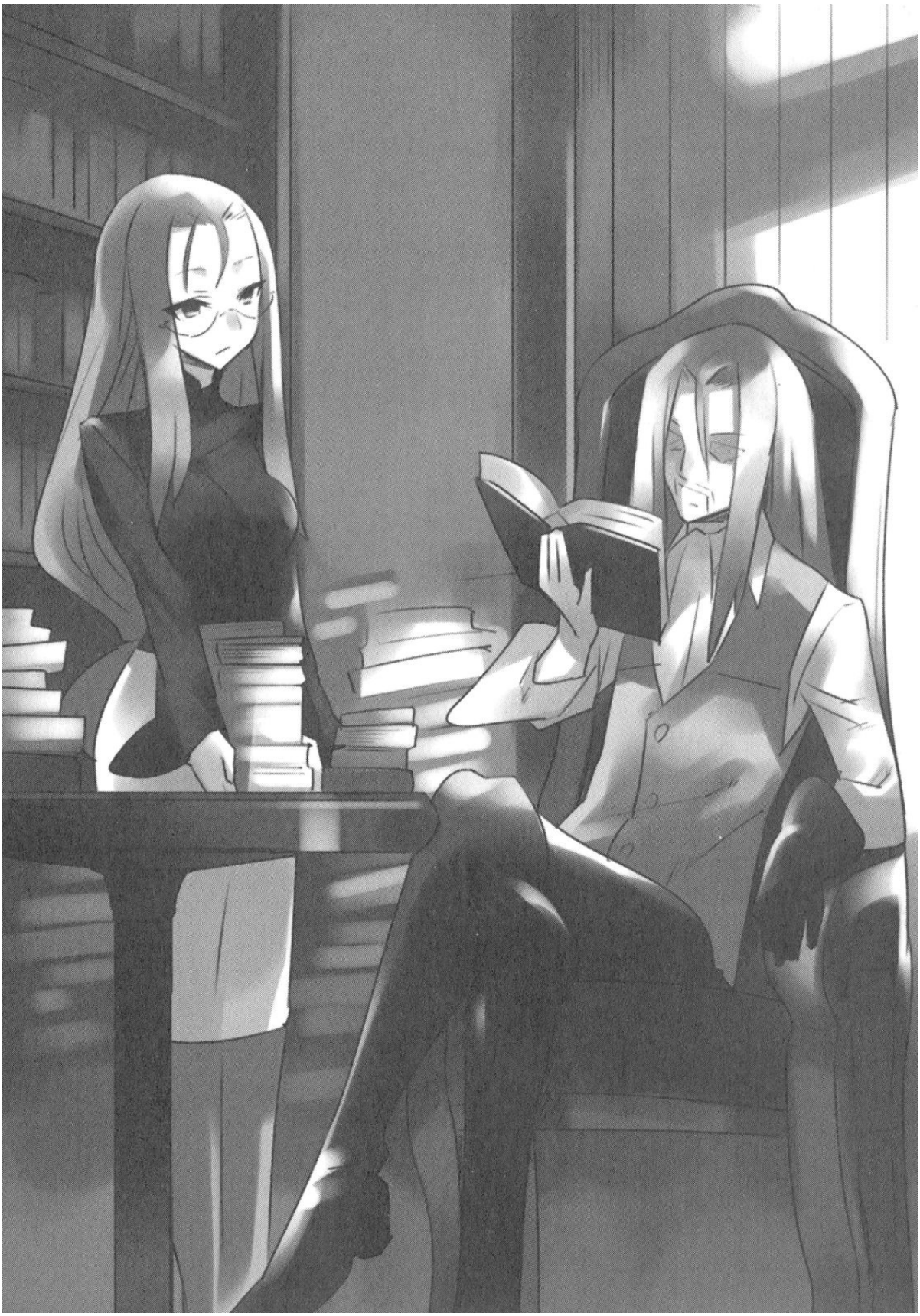
Then, she went to the room down the hall, opened the door and saw a single room with a very poor interior appearance.

On the top of the big bed next to the window she saw a sheet which had various patches across its surface, the wallpaper on the walls was completely faded to the point that she could not figure out what was the original color on the paper.

However, the room had a feature that was obvious: on an oak panel with several columns of books stacked on it, plus some books were also scattered across the floor near it.

Truly this room is really like a mini library. And then she saw a figure of a tall man sitting in that room reading a book, surrounded by so many books, almost literally, he was buried in them.

“You’re still carefree, Wardes.”



While his gray eyes remained attentive, without leaving his eyes on the book in his hands Wardes said:

“By this point in my life, I doubt that there are still people who have any hostile intent against me or anything like that.”

Compared to the time he was in Albion, participating as a member of RECONQUISTA, she distinguish a slight thinness in his body, leaving that aside there was no other significant change in his manners.

Dressed in the outfits of a simple commoner, however, the presence emanating through his body was that of a noble military veteran who had fought countless battles.

The woman, who had originally been called the Fouquet The Crumbling Dirt, suddenly dropped the books in her arms to the side where Wards was.

“Oh God, since the war ended with Albion you just spend your time sitting here reading books, do you want to be an academian or something?”

Wardes did not respond to that.

“Giving money to children again?

“How did you know?”

“From here, you can hear voices outside. You know you should not do anything to draw attention. Isn't that what you always say?”

At this Fouquet raised her eyebrows.

“Hey you know, these children are refugees from Albion, they cannot afford to do whatever they want such as spending their days wasting time like others, ehh.”

After their defeat in Albion, Wards decided to come to Romalia with Fouquet. But overall, Wardes actions since then were reduced only to read, read and keep reading books.

He was reading a history book.

Even having said that, it should be stressed that it was not any history book, it was a book by which Fouquet had gone through many problems trying to steal.

It was a secret that to this day had been dormant within the confines of the headquarters of the Holy Church of Romalia. In it, the government of Romalia the Holy Church, recorded various past events such as oppression, wars with foreign nations and others that stressed the dictatorial character of Romalia.

Is this really the time to get lost and engrossed in a book? Wards was really getting in Fouquet's nerves, but with an angry voice trying to get his attention she said:

“Hey Wardes, I think it's time that we talk seriously. From the beginning it caught my attention, but what was the real reason we came to Romalia?”

Wardes was expressionless. All he did was change the page while still reading, seeing him do this irritated Fouquet. She approached Wards and took the pendant that hung to his chest.

Apparently it was a locket, then Fouquet carelessly opened it and saw a portrait of a beautiful woman.

“Do not take the picture of the woman you want to spend the rest of your life, instead in here you still have the picture of your mother.”

Even after Fouquet say that, Wardes's face seemed not to pay attention.

“Wardes, I'm willing to give you my support no matter what, so tell me all this has to do with something that happened to your mother? You who abandoned everything and completely surrendered yourself, even your intervention in RECONQUISTA now just heightens the crusade initiated by Romalia. Tell me: You’ve done all of this because you have one goal in mind, Right?”

Despite the words of Fouquet, Wardes continued in silence, which ultimately caused Fouquet to lost her temper.

“Ah! So yeah, if you intend to ignore me at all, it’s fine, but then I’ll make it clear, you have in your hands is the last thing I will do for you: stealing. So I hope you're really enjoying your book for it will be the last.”

Then as she pulled his ear and told him:

“Also… forgive me for bring up your mother.”

Then Wardes, without looking in the book, said:

“My mother was a head researcher at the ACADEMY.”

“ACADEMY you say, do not tell me it was in that era where someone spoke of his own research?”

“Yes, something like that. At that time my mother was a researcher of history and earth science, but her mental health once reached its limit, and fell ill. The ACADEMY abandoned her and thereafter gave order to lock her in the mansion. My father and other relatives said "This is what happens when women try to embark on research too difficult for them." And I thought the same. Oh god, I remember how my mother changed that time: she was delirious babbling nonsense such as "Jean Jacques have to go to the Holy Land", and repeated again and again. And in the end, my father ended up confining her to the innermost room of the mansion.”

Hearing this Fouquet started to frown.

“I’m sorry to hear what happened to your mother. However, is it so that these delusions you mention, don't tell me you take these seriously? Was that the reason you joined RECONQUISTA?”

“I also thought these were nothing more than hallucinations due her sickness, and because of that the only thing that I feel for my mother was nothing but shame. But still I cannot say that was the worst of it, how many times have I said "stop now", how many ...?”

“So, what was the reason you decided to fulfill the desire of your mother?”

At that moment from his chest Wardes took a small book from a bag, then without saying anything he give it to Fouquet.

“What’s this?”

“It's the diary of my mother.”

“I'm surprised that you still keep things from your parents.”

So, Fouquet began to read that journal. Apparently this started from the time of birth of Wardes.

The joy she felt for her son could be seen her the words written that day, letters showed how touched she was when Wardes was born.

After that point, which predominated in that diary was the memories of the days she spent as a researcher at the ACADEMY.

Apparently the research focused in certain wind stones lying along the Halkeginian continent.

The contents of the diary was written in a way that it was difficult to understand for those who were not familiar with the same research, so it was likely that the mother of Wardes did not plan that someone besides her would read it.

And the truth was that Fouquet really had no desire to read it, but ... Being an earth mage like the diarist she was curious, but somehow she could not understand what was written on it.

“It seems that your mother's research focused on developing more efficient ways to extract wind stones. But how does that relate to you and the holy land?” While she murmured this, Fouquet continued reading the diary.

After reading for a while, going over every paragraph of that book with her finger, suddenly something written there made Fouquet stop.

The letter in question was no more than a single sentence:

I discovered a terrible secret that lies in the border of the continent, a terrible secret ...

From that point all journal entries focused on the "terrible secret", which apparently was what caused Wardes's mother to lost her sanity due to fear.

I cannot tell this to anyone. Oh god what do I have I to do? Please tell me god!

Fouquet swallowed. Why would Wardes's mother didn't tell that awful secret to

anyone else? What will have been the cause? But if she was someone important, a researcher of the ACADEMY ... If we cannot get to the holy land, none of us would be saved, but first we have to retrieve it from the clutches of elves or else destruction ...

Looking, without success, it could be any reference to the true nature of that awful secret. It was just that the "secret" to find something necessary but keep it only for herself, what was apparently caused the disorder in her mind.

Dear Jean, my precious Jean Jacques, please, you have to recover the Holy Land rather than your mother, surely it is the key to our salvation ...

So from that day the written in the diary were just nonsense annotations constantly repeating...

Jean Jacques, go to the holy land ... and so, it's how the diary ended.

“I was 20 when I discovered that diary, I found it while I was busy cleaning my mother's room.”

“You know, I don't mean to speak ill of your mother but, to me this does not seem more than the hallucinations of a patient. No matter what is this terrible secret, believing in this diary and deciding to go to the holy land is something unlikely, don’t you think?

“There is something more important than believing or not believing. “ Wardes said in a voice that evidenced his weariness.

“What do you mean ‘something’?”

“I was the one who killed my own mother.”

“Huh?”

“I, at that time, had just turned 12. It was the day we had a party at the mansion. For some reason, I know my mother came out of her room right at the moment when the party came to a climax. So when we heard the commotion she was just in the hallway, and again she kept repeating my name. At this point from the bottom of my heart, I really come to hate my mother. At the time we were about to take her back to her room, she was already on the edge of the stairs, then

when she tried to hug ...”

With a blank expression, Wardes stopped and stared for a moment at his left artificial arm.

“I do not think that I will shove her. I was only 12 years old, I was in "that age", for me the affection from my mother was so irritating and despicable that I could not stand it, not to mention having what everyone called "a lunatic mom" was more embarrassing than anything else that had happened to me. In truth, I only wanted to give a little push, but then she lost her balance and began falling down the stairs. She broke her neck and had been twisted though only slightly, but even now I still remember it clearly, my mother's neck bent as if they the spina ...”

Wardes closed his eyes for a moment.

“They said it was an accident, my father even take it as such. Surely, my father had hard times dealing with the illness of mother. He always tried to comfort me in times when the memories haunted me for my sin. "Your mother is resting in peace, you did not do anything wrong," he said.”

Fouquet at that moment could not do anything but stay attentive to Wardes story, and so he, in a voice completely devoid of intonation continued:

“Since then, those memories haunted me for 8 years. All that time I devoted myself in studying and practicing(magic). I felt that if I didn't I could never atone for the sin of "killing my mother." But when I turned 20, that was when I found that diary and then discovered the cause of my mother's illness. And I couldn’t forgive myself that time, the time I believe my mother was no more than a weak woman.”

Then Wardes began to plunge his body in the chair as if it swallows him.

“You need to understand Matilda! To go to the holy land is a must. If there is something in that place I don’t care, my sole objective is to fulfill the last will of my mother. I'll go to the holy land regardless!”

Then Fouquet stretched her arms up to Wardes’ neck and then embraced him lovingly.

“I finally get it, I will never leave your side. You're an orphan, a poor child who has been abandoned even by yourself.”

Oh poor orphan, every time I encounter such a child, I cannot leave him.

The sweet embrace of Fouquet really resembled that of a mother. So as part of all the love that emanated from Fouquet, she began to hum a lullaby.

After a few moments with a face full of concern Fouquet asked Wardes.

“You ... Are you really intending to participate in the crusade?”

“To get involved in the madness of what Romalia is planning is certainly unwise, however, that would be the fastest way to achieve my goal. Besides, I feel the urge to know what it is that "terrible secret" that ended the heart of my mother.”

“So this is the real reason you made me steal all those books. Oh god, sneaking into the imperial library was not child's play you know. So tell me: Was it worth it, you found out anything?”

“At this moment I haven’t found anything as big as you think. However, it is was certain that at this very moment Romalia has doing something but ... After all the dirty deeds this country has, what was to be expected?”

Then Wardes threw on the table the records of the secret meetings held by the executive committee of Romalia:

“Oppression, murder, annihilation ... If they suspect you, they will kill you immediately. If it's for the good of the founder, it does not matter even if the world is destroyed, that is the level of fanaticism that these types handled. Compared with them, seriously, RECONQUISTA looks nothing.”

“If we are practical, it's really fair to say it was not much.”

Tock! tock!

Right in the middle of their conversation, someone knocked on the door.

Without wasting a single second Fouquet and Wardes walked away. From her chest, Fouquet took out her wand.

Wardes also took his military wand located right next to him.

Tock! tock!

Once again the door was hit, then Wardes glanced to Fouquet, then she shook his head as if to say that she did not have the slightest idea what was going on.

At the end Wardes decided to approach the door and then said:

“Who is it?”

“I am the representative of the government of Romalia.”

It was the voice of a young girl, then Fouquet murmured softly:

“...That is not gonna happen if you don’t do something stupid!”

“But isn’t that what we've been doing since the beginning?”

Determined to find out who was it, Wardes started to open the door while firmly holding his military wand with his right hand.

Seeing the character standing there knocking on the door just a moment ago, Wardes couldn’t help but be surprised as he watched the girl with a skeptical eye.

That "Romalian representative" in truth she was a peculiar character. Her age was about 10 years old and in her white priestess robes, she really looked like a small deacon of the church.

Intimidated by the brightness, The little girl’s eyes dimmed and shrugged her body as if trying to hide.

“The government of Romalia? Could you tell us what are the issues they have with us?”

By asking this question, the little girl said with a trembling voice:

“Ah, this ... If I'm not mistaken, you are Viscount Wardes and Miss Sachsen Gotha, right?”

Wardes set out to see if someone was behind the girl, in addition to sharpening his senses he started to detect if someone was in the hallway or downstairs or even outside the building, but in the end he couldn't feel anyone hiding nearby.

Confirming the identity of that girl, apparently he concluded that she had come to this place alone. Therefore, the courage of this girl really amazed him.

Rather than trying to deny it, Wardes seemed to be more interested. He tried to be honest and admitted what they are doing, although he began to think that they will not gain anything if they refused. In the worst cases, they must already be surrounded by a battalion of knights.

“Yes, we are, however right now we do not keep any relationship with RECONQUISTA.”

“We were already aware of it.”

“May I ask how do you know who we are?”

“That would be because you two are a very famous ...”

Wardes then turned around and as if to tell Fouquet "because we're going to do" and extended his both hands.

“Sorry, but from the moment you entered the country we have been watching you constantly, so we are aware of your actions and ... I apologize.”

A smile appeared on the face of Wardes. As expected of Romalia. Even so it was a bit frustrating knowing they were trapped so easily, and even after taking precautions to conceal their identity like dressing and using false passports to enter the country.

“It seems we have been dancing in the palm of your hands from the beginning. So if I have to guess, at this time we are stuck waiting to know what you want from us.”

The girl nodded.

“We will return the book, as I finished reading it completely, and tell me, would it be too much to forgive us this time? The truth is that we do not have anything

planned at all that would be against their interests, just did our best to try to conclude some research we are doing, and that we are in the best of spirits to attend Romalia with this crusade”

Hearing Wardes saying this, the little girl, as if a great burden had been lifted from her shoulders, sighed.

“I am very glad to hear you say that. To be honest my parcel ask for the cooperation of two of you, because these are the wishes of my master.”

“I would like know who is your master?”

After hearing this, the young girl, after making a respectful bow, took a letter from her chest. Upon reading the sender's name Wardes expression changed completely.

"From the Servant of the People, Vittorio Serevare"

“ ... Pope, Your Holiness Aegis 32nd sacrum, is your master?”

While her little head was still down she informed Wardes:

“My master is waiting right now.”

Chapter 3 - Josette's Garden Party

Three days after the the garden party to commemorate the coronation of the new Queen...

In the courtyard of the palace of Versailles, a huge stage was built for the planned dance party to celebrate the ‘The Advent of the Founder’.

All the nobles who would participated in this event were gaily dressed as the party was about to begin.

This party was some kind of an opera that represents the advent of the founder, Brimir. On stage there were already dancing nobles representing the Founder and people welcoming his arrival.

Upon hearing the musicians as they play a piece of lively music, Josette was nervous in her private tent, which also serves as dressing room and was located right next to the stage.

“I cannot, I cannot dan ... I cannot dance in that place! All of them are watching me!“ The role Josette in that scene was... the main character in this colorful musical drama, the role of a woman saint.

Beside her was a handsome priest, wanting to see Josette’s dress, he approached her and pat her head.

“It's all right, just remember what we practiced last night.”

“You're right, but ...”

“At this moment, all of them are waiting to see the new "Queen" dancing. We must do everything in our power not to betray their expectations.”

Then gradually they could heard the "tempo" of the music rising, this was the

sign that it was about time to leave her tent. Right now, Josette was unable to take a single step, she just started to look at the blue dress she was wearing, which she had chosen for this occasion.

It was a dress with a bold emphasis, wearing a gorgeous neckline both in front and back, it was really a good dress, highlighting the elegance of her childish slender figure. But she does not see it that way, however, for her, this dress helped strengthen the only reason that prevented her one step.

Those noble ladies who were dancing at the moment, all possessed a graceful femininity such that if Josette was able to dance at the same place with them, the comparison between her and these nobles will emerge. *I will be embarrassed...*

“You have nothing to worry about, as there is no one in this country who would be able to tease the Queen's dance.”

“I don’t care what they think about me right now...” Josette said without reservation.

“Well then, everything is ready.”

“But... I don’t want you to see me... cause they will try to make fool of me. All of them are very good, they are all so beautiful! If I have to dance in that place, they would probably think that I’m only a little girl.”

“Never mind that! In this world, you are the most wonderful girl!”

Julio said this to Josette while stroking her head, for her it was enough that her heart was filled with joy.

“Well, then I'll dance with you.”

“Huh?” There was no time to wonder, Julio took her hand, together they went to the stage and immediately dance at its center.

The nobles that were already dancing immediately stepped backward to open the way for the queen, as they welcomed her with spirited cheers and applause. Those shouts of encouragement and joy have been enough for Josette to stay frozen in the middle of the stage. But...

Right in front of her eyes, Julio continued dancing, then the cheering stopped due to the strong impression that caused by his fabulous dance form. Josette had also been astonished by such a display of skill, then, as if hypnotized by his light steps, Julio took her hand and began to guide her, then they started their dance.

Being able to witness the dance of Julio, from Josette's heart a warm feelings rose and invaded her whole being. She had realized that this made her heart thrill for the first time.

Then, Josette took the opportunity to bring one of her flushed cheeks together with Julio and muttered: "This is wonderful!"

This is it. Josette finally realized it.

The true nature of those little bursts waving her chest. The mysterious anxiety that beat her down violently every 5 seconds.

I don't want to lose him. She thought at that moment.

The ballad music was started to play around her, along with the cries of greetings and applause. But before her, for her eyes, all she could see right now, was the man who smiled along with the magnificent blue stone castle behind him, she could only see her beloved Julio and nothing more.

Then she felt a strange warmth of the tears running her cheeks. This feeling, it was a totally new experience she had ever felt in her life. Lately, all kinds of emotions similar to this, which until then she had not understood, invade more and more frequently.

But now, finally, she could clearly identify the name of this emotion.

"I'm so happy!"

A thunderous storm of applause was dropped on them, then, Josette returned to her tent.

Sweat ran down her face which caused her a nice feeling but wonders, *when was the last time I was moved much?*.

"You're pretty good." Julio said this praise, then Josette replied in a timid voice:

“That's because you were by my side, all I did was to be guided as we danced.”

“It seems that you weren’t satisfied, well, it was the least that could be expected.”

“What's the next thing I have to do?”

“The following: give a rest to Her Majesty the Queen who has worked both in her role in the dance, and then continue with the celebration of the great feast.”

Apparently all that Josette could do right now was rest.

“Julio, tell me, will you stay with me?”

Then as if to say "of course" Julio nodded to her question.

Upon leaving her tent, Josette met a group of followers of the queen, those noble, loud and eagerly began to circle her.

Within that group of nobles were some who looked reluctant upon seeing Julio who had become a frequent companion of the queen, however, none of them dared to raise such complaints against him, for there could be consequences for what they might say.

After all, they knew very well he had been attending their Queen who possesses the crown at this very moment.

Still, they know that this young girl carrying the crown was nothing more than a puppet controlled by Romalia. They and the former supporters of Orlean's faction still believe that the course of things right now will lead towards a bright and new age.

Although the Queen was in her best dispositions to help continue the crusade, they did not pay attention to the issue of imminent danger of those actions, they knew that in the end, the bloodshed on the battlefield would not be theirs.

Just as they arrived at the gates of the palace, the group following her has finally dissolved. In the palace when Josette finally got to her room, the first thing she set out to do was to immediately get on the bed.

After the sudden outburst, Josette slowly gathered herself and sat on her bed, then Julio went to her and extended both his arms. In response, Josette took his arms gently and gave him a hug.

Then as if encourage by him, Josette bowed her head and then kissed his lips. After finishing with her kiss, without thinking Josette muttered "This happiness..." I wonder if there is any girl happier than me?

With this in mind, the next thing she did was to observe her room, it was a beautiful room with a lot of fine furniture. It immediately provoked a comparison between this and the bedroom she shared with all other nuns while living in Saint Margarita, it was really a huge difference.

Also in her mind, was the idea of what she had obtained so far when she followed Julio, all these valuable items belonged to her now, the palace and even the whole kingdom of Gallia ...

At that moment ...

In the mind of Josette, the memories of three days ago was revived. She was reminded of who was standing in this room, that little girl who had the same face ... her twin sister.

The happiness that I'm enjoying right now ...

This idea was in her mind, a sense of something dark creeping into her being and disturbing precisely the current Josette. She was aware that this darkness was in amounts equal to those of the happiness that dwelt in her heart. *It was blaming her.*

Yes, that is, the happiness I feel right now ...

Seeing Josette's face suddenly clouded by grief intrigued Julio as he tilted his head.

“What’s the matter?”

“I... The happiness that I'm enjoying right now, I stole it from my sister.”

After hearing, this Julio nodded to what Josette said.

“Yes you did.”

Josette could only sat staring at Julio while saying this.

“You stole the crown that belonged to your sister, all in order to achieve your own happiness.”

“It hurts...”

“Do you want me to tell you a lie? or perhaps, some beautiful words ... how about this: Happiness is something you cannot achieved if it is founded from the sufferings of others, do you really want me to lie to you by saying this kind of nonsense? Do you want me to comfort you?”

Josette bit her lip, then her eyes filled with tears, she then stated:

“I know that I'm nothing but a dirty thief, no matter how many sins I made, I promised myself never to hate you. So long as I had decided, no matter what ever happens I will not regret my actions.”

Julio for a moment just keep silent while watching Josette, then he murmured softly:

“Well said.”

“I know that, I know you do not love me even a little, you’re only using me, but ... to be with you, kissing your lips ... that's enough for me, that is my happiness.”

Julio gritted his eyes. This was a rare gesture for him, like the slight tremor that shook his shoulders.

After leaving Josette asleep, Julio started to leave the room. Then for a moment, he stares on the runes inscribed on the back of his right hand as he watched them flicker and then continue walking while frowning evidencing the confusion that was in his mind.

As he walked down the aisle, Julio saw a young woman came walking towards him, then he decided to stop this young woman with long blue hair.

With a simple outfit that covered her body, she looks like a housekeeper. The young woman realized the presence of Julio and offered him a bow. Then she tried to continue walking, at the time when she had him on her back, a voice from Julio was heard:

“Aren’t you her highness? Princess Isabella?”

Hearing this, Isabella stopped and then turned back.

“Excuse me, do you have business to discuss with me?”

“My name Julio Chesaré and if you may, it would be so kind if you lend me a few minutes of your time to chat.”

“It would certainly be my honor to exchange words with the eminent priest of Romalia.”

That said, after accepting the cordial greeting from Isabella, Julio started to openly explain his true intentions.

“If I remember correctly, I heard you are in control of an order of knights, aren’t you?

“Order of knights? You’re just teasing me!” Isabella laughed as she said this, however, Julio did not laugh at all.

“The Order of the Knights of northern flower garden. The flower garden gentlemen belonging to Gallia as I have understood, each flower garden is named with respect to the location of a cardinal point, however ... apparently there is a flower garden that corresponds to the north, and even then among people, the name for the order there... perhaps you are aware of these famous rumors.”

“And then, did you intend to say that I'm the leader of this order?”

“Precisely.”

After such statement, Julio remained staring at Isabella as if threatening her to say something, any attempt to hide anything or try to run away from this conversation would be useless. Isabella, knowing fully well that this was a trap,

tries to devise a way to get out of the complicated situation she had gotten.

How did you know? How did you discover my true identity? Or is it maybe...

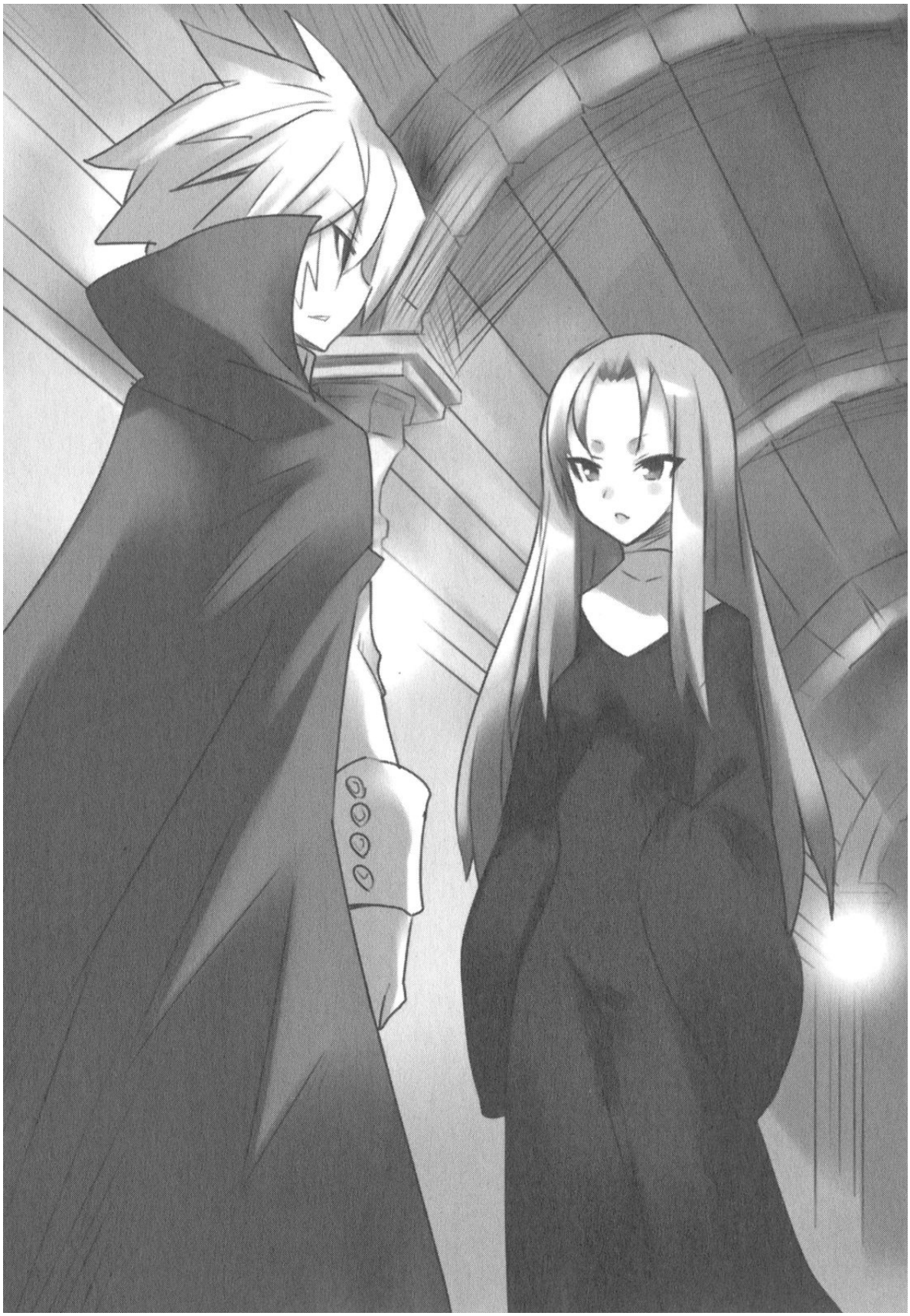
Did he knew that I’m aware about the impersonation of the Queen?

Isabella was dubious about how much she actually knew Julio, this had turned into a situation that was not foreseen in her plans.

Then Isabella came to a conclusion, however, the risk of the bet was making her lips numb almost preventing her talk.

If I say this, there might be complication for my actions, but right now I do not think there is another option that allows me to earn his trust.

Isabella felt her mouth dry and her chest heaving, and for a moment she thought about stopping, but eventually reconsidered, "everything will be fine".



He thinks "I'm easy to deal with" and this is an advantage that I can use.

Then Isabella showed a forced smile, this was almost too obvious but she knew this would not interfere with her plans.

“In that case, will you let me to ask you a question?”

“You still haven’t answered my question.”

Ignoring Julio in his statement, Isabella then said:

“Would you kindly tell me, who is the person currently using the crown?”

That direct question had served at the same time to respond to the question of Julio. He, after hearing this, smiled broadly.

“I knew from the beginning that you were the only one who couldn’t be deceived.”

“You’re mistaken. Never been my intention to condemn you for what you have done, however, I would like to thank you for the great favor that you have done.”

“What are you trying to say?”

“As you might be aware, I am the daughter of Joseph the former king, or rather, I am the daughter whose duty is to take revenge on Queen Charlotte ... No, maybe it was before that, when Queen Charlotte was one members of my brigade of knights. I always desire her death, consciously designating the most dangerous missions for her, but yet countless times, she proved to be a formidable adversary.”

What she just said was an undeniable truth. Isabella didn’t know how far Julio has knowledge about her, however, there was no reason not to believe her story.

“All this time, I've been thinking when my execution would take place. So it's fair to say, that I consider you as my savior.”

“Well, I guess with this in mind our talk will be quick. The point is, we want you to become our ally, of course, a vast reward and high office is what we offer in exchange for your services.”

“That was an intriguing offer.”

“Well, then will you become our ally?”

Isabella seemed to assent to the proposition of Julio, but she resisted to the pressure.

“Before I decide, I have a condition.”

“Please tell me.”

“I would like to know specifically what will be the reward being offered.”

“Of course, well then, how about we offer the double amount of whatever the queen has?”

Isabella shook her head giving a negative answer.

“Make it three times. That's the price to pay for me to betray my country.”

Isabella stared to Julio silently while watching him doing some calculations. In the end, he end up nodding at her request.

“All right, so be it.”

“Please, would you not think of me as a greedy woman. Well then as the daughter of "the mad king", it is impossible to think that this palace is a good place to reside.”

“No, if I may put it bluntly, I would like you to stay here, as this would greatly facilitate our work, then I will give you your first mission.”

“And what would that be?”

“I'd like you to keep an eye on the guests who belong to the nation of Tristain, all without exception, from the Queen to the lowest-ranking soldier, and especially I want to you guard both Chevalier Hiraga Saito and Miss Vallière. You mustn’t take your eyes off even for a second from those two.”

“It seems just the other day a group of people from Tristain was attacked by a murderer, it was my surprise to learn that the attacker was a gentleman formerly

from my brigade, apparently he has become a member of a group of mercenaries.”

The one who had attacked Saito, was one of the ‘brothers of the elements’(elemental siblings). Remembering what had happened, Isabella used this event to build the credibility of her words.

“So it was, the world is a small place after all, then you would also keep me updated of the developments in this matter. “ However, it could be perceived in the tone of the Julio, this issue was not really his interest. This seemed a proof that the elemental siblings and Julio, together with his master, were unrelated.

Then Isabella nodded.

“Leave it in my hands, we established our efficiency that far exceeds the amount of money wasted by you, gentlemen representing the church.”

“Very well, I look forward to seeing the results, then if I may, have a nice day!”

After saying goodbye to Isabella, Julio was ready to continue his path, then at the time Isabella was no longer able to see the figure of his back, she exhaled a huge sigh of relief.

That priest named Julio may look stylish and handsome on the outside, but inside he hides a dangerous mind as sharp as a blade, *now I get it, how possible this reckless conspiracy to impersonate the queen has succeeded and who was its Machiavellian author.*

Then Isabella muttered as if whispering:

“I wonder if this was the right thing to do, Chikasui.”

Then, she heard the voice of the Intelligence-knife at her waist.

“I'm not impressed that much, but I must admit that your performance was passable, Your Highness.”

“Well, after all, I guess this was the quickest way to find the location of Her Majesty.”

Being escorted by Agnes, Henrietta was still in a bad spirit mainly because of Romalia's conspiracy to impersonate the Queen Charlotte and make this impostor participate Gallia in continuing the crusade, these thoughts assailed her head as she took a walk in the courtyard of the palace of Versailles.

She knew that now there was nothing she and her friends could do to improve the situation.

Isabella had made it clear that she was the one responsible for investigating the whereabouts of Tabitha. As for them, they had no choice but to keep waiting.

And if she could not find the whereabouts of Charlotte ...

No, I wouldn't even imagine what will happen then. At this rate Gallia will fall under the complete control of Romalia.

"Ahhh ... almost been a week since the party was held in the garden, eh." Said Henrietta and then Agnes nodded to her statement.

"Right."

"As long as ... order will soon find Queen Charlotte and re-take her place on the throne ... I wonder if she can really withdraw the declaration of help to wage the crusade ..."

"Good question."

Again, Agnes replied in an almost indifferent voice.

"It seems you are in low-spirit, commander." Henrietta said while keeping her eyes fixed on Agnes, but Agnes nevertheless continued with the freshness of her face.

"Look here, you should act according to the times of crisis like we're experiencing, this is serious, maybe even the war against the elves is an imminent reality. But right now we cannot do anything but wait, right, so don't

worry about things that are beyond our control, for it does nothing to improve our situation.”

“Well, that's true but ...”

“If you keep thinking about the enemy all the time, then you will not be able to fight when you really needed. You as the queen, should always maintain a calm and objective vision. But even having said that, after all, human beings are nothing more than objects that cannot go against their own fate.”

"Haahh" after hearing what Agnes had to say, Henrietta could not help but breathe a small sigh.

“As I thought, is it perhaps that you cannot trust me to these situations?”

I do not think that's a question that needs to be said to a subordinate.

The response provoked Agnes and lifted her lips.

“You see, there are times that you need to be yourself and rest from everything. It means, to be the queen, you really need to have a partner to help you bear your sorrows.”

After saying that, Agnes couldn’t help but look away while a compound expression formed on her face. As a vassal, Agnes knew she had to keep a respectful distance from her master, and she was not sure how Henrietta appreciated her opinion.

Someone, will there be one with whom to share my pain and release my heart ...?

Suddenly, Henrietta recalled a clue that perhaps could answer her questions.

The one who has come from another world, the vice commander of the Ondine Knights. *For what I know about him, he seemed to be totally honest no matter what the subject is.*

Why is ...

While questioning she suddenly noticed what was that reason, *that's why ... maybe it's because he is not a human that belongs to this world ... Currently, he*

is a gentleman who is at my service, with all his efforts, he achieved a lot of success and confidence from those around him. He has become 'The Savior' both in our country and in my own name.

But he is not a human that belongs to this world. To this day he still holds the enticing aura typical of a mysterious "stranger". If it comes to him, otherwise it may also happen with other people, I really be able to find the calmness I need in my heart if I am at his side. Surely that must be the reason why I can talk about anything with him. However *he ... He is the lover of my best friend Louise. Even though I feel alone and know that he is always willing to listen to my problems, I cannot afford to be naive and think about something else.* The other day, after the fight she had with Louise, Henrietta just like when they were children she took the time for reflection. She realized unforgivable acts that hurt her most important and beloved friend ...

While Henrietta kept walking and thinking on these matters, they came to an open place in the courtyard adorned by a kiosk, all the clearing was covered with wild roses tangled in its structure, it really was a place to rest her soul.

Then the Henrietta see a couple of familiar figures sitting together on a bench in that place, she remained perplexed and provoked.

"Oi, aren't those two Louise and Saito?" Said Agnes trying to get their attention, however Henrietta held her to cease her attempt.

" ... Huh, what's the matter?"

Agnes, with a puzzled face, did not know what was happening. Henrietta guided her and observed where her finger was pointing.

Louise and Saito were sitting together on a bench, sitting beside each other, what they're doing there was not clear, they were just sitting while watching each other silently. Apparently, the shame that remained in them since the night two days ago was what prevented them from speaking.

Louise stared at Saito, who was sitting right next to her, while she kept her fists together with her knees resting on them. Her cheeks were slightly flushed, her mouth drew a small . She had finally detached from the habit which she used for so long, at this moment she was dressed in clothes that she had borrowed from Agnes's wardrobe.

A linen shirt that covered her head and a sturdy cotton trousers were specifically what she was wearing.

Below that is simple garb that concealed the dazzling beauty of her body, Saito knew these as well.

He imagined the white smooth skin of Louise with that shirt that really favored him. It was like a canvas that had a mysterious purity.

Aaaaah... Saito groaned from the bottom of his heart.

I saw her skin before but still ... sitting here being so close to her makes me incredibly nervous. Being so close, I cannot think Louise being as usual. Louise, which I still remember the exact shape and color of her chest. And besides, l, l, I also remember what was below her navel, the shape of her hips, and, and, and ... By recalling all the body parts of Louise that were illuminated by the moonlight before, his breath remained dry even after seeing them.

Saito did not know what he had to say at this moment, and because of that indecision he couldn't continue watching, then he turned his sights away. However, the first thought that assault his mind was the refreshing beauty of the naked body of Louise.

Unable to fend for any reason for these thoughts of his mind, Saito began to feel himself as a dirty and degenerate beast, though he could not fight his instincts, he just could not think of anything else.

I have to do it, this is not the time to think about those things...

That is, *I have to concentrate on more important matters, like Tabitha and her supposed twin sister who had replaced her, and those subjects who have followed and attacked me persistently... those criminals who call themselves 'Elemental Siblings'.* In fact there was a mountain of priorities which should cater Saito. And yet, the only thing that kept going round and round in his head was: the nudity of Louise.

Then Saito took his hands in his head and began to cry - UOOOOOOOOOOOOOOHH!

Seeing this Saito, Louise did not hesitate to tell a somewhat irritated voice:

“Hey why are you shouting!?”

“Huh? Not this is... nothing!” He said trying to convince Louise.

“.... You, you’re simply comparing right? Comparing 'this' with all those women you've seen so far, do not try to fool me by comparing!”

Saito shook his head immediately trying to calm down Louise who was already clenching her fists as her body began to tremble.

“Huh? No! Of course not!”

“Well, then you should say what you’re thinking, say it immediately!”

While her nose echoed by her heavy breathing, Louise said this to Saito as she watched intently. And because of that tremendous pressure, Saito was left with no choice but to say what he was thinking.

“Eh, this ... the color was beautiful and ...”

“The color? Of what?”

“Your chest, heh, heh ...”

After saying these, suddenly a small fist lunged at him. He attempted to dodge it but Saito ended up on the floor.

“You! Why! Why?!” Saito complained.

“I did it because it's embarrassing! Why are you saying such things!?”

“But you're the one who asked!”

Then Louise calm down and placed her foot on his head, and then she begin to murmur.

“If it is, I'll ask, but I did it because there is something I wanted to hear from you, very important, extremely important.”

Then, as she looked down Louise started squeezing her fists again.

“But everything went well I guess...” Saito sighed.

“Huh? What went well?”

“No, this ... is that I cannot believe I’m so happy.”

“What does that mean?”

“Well, really, at this moment the situation is incredibly complicated, Tabitha has been abducted and war may break out at any time, and yet ...”

Saito was speechless for one second trying to find the words he meant.

“So that was it. They requested us to act as if we knew nothing, we were told "Do not worry, we'll find the whereabouts of her Majesty the Queen" and so, contrary to what should do, we must remain calm and unconcern, until they found the location of Tabitha...” Saito sighed and added:

“But, it's not that, my happiness is really simpler than that, really, I'm happy to be surrounded by moments of happiness.”

“But say, what is it to be happy for? It is obvious that human beings should enjoy happy moments, as they would not survive if they only concentrate on the bad things that happen, but then tell me why are you so happy?”

“That's because you have accepted me, that has caused me unimaginable joy, I'm so happy that I can now stop worrying about everything else.”

After saying this, Louise rushed to answer:

“Accept you? I Did? When?”

“Never mind, I just know it, indeed, when a woman accepts a man, "this" is the only proof you need.”

“So what you're saying is, I let you saw my body?”

“Yes, but we haven’t done anything. But you clearly told me that I could do it, right? and that's what has made me so happy, incredibly happy.”

After hearing him say this, Louise's face turned completely red, she did not

know what had gotten Saito glad to such an extent, however at this moment it was inevitable that she really had given permission for that Saito could do whatever he wanted ...

“But then I wonder, what it really okay for me to enjoy so much happiness? With so much pain and suffering in the world, do I really deserve this happiness?”

Then Louise took the hand of Saito.

“It’s all right.”

“Huh?”

“You see, I sometimes think about it, and say it's okay, we deserve it, because of all the dangerous situations we've had to pass, but now we're fine, and if tomorrow we die before they can rescue Tabitha, or perhaps maybe lose our life when faced against Romalia conspiracy.”

It was then that Louise began to approach Saito, and sink her cheek on his arm, then she said in a small voice:

“And that's why I decided to show you my skin, I wanted to show you that no matter what happened my feelings for you will never change. I want to fully enjoy the moments spending with you, the moments that I want to cherish forever. So if something bad may happen, however, I do not want to live with regrets."

At these words Saito felt as if a light was lit inside him, then without thinking, he immediately hugged Louise as hard as he could.

"This, really, stop thinking seriously about death, although in dangerous situations like this, we must be very careful. So promise me not to die, think that no matter what happens everything will be fine. Continue to believe this and then, this ...”

“And we should treasure every moment of our lives as if this were the most important of all, is this what you mean?”

Saito nodded his head while Louise was resting on his chest.

“Yeah, that's right.”

Saito slowly began to bring his lips against hers, one soft kiss, mixed with the warm breath caused Louise and Saito to lost in a dream.

At that moment, full of happiness was born when the two held their breath. Then, Saito began thinking about his comrades, about all the people around him in his life, he also wanted them to be able to feel the same happiness he felt at this moment, and that is why, he would rescue Tabitha no matter what the cost. And that's why he would use all the power he had to stop the crusade.

But in that moment ... suddenly the same uneasiness that assault Saito yesterday was present once again.

But would I able to do? Can I do it? I've already been beaten twice by the Elemental Siblings ...?

Then Saito carefully move away from Louise.

“What happened? You’re very strange since yesterday.”

“It's nothing ...”

“What is it? Tell me, was it not enough for me to be the only one by your side? as I thought, youuuu ...”

“No, no, it’s nothing like that!”

“Well, then explain!”

“It’s not what you think.” Saito said as he shook his head. ”I was just thinking that I'm too weak ... for I was defeated twice by these guys who call themselves Elemental Siblings ... If only I were a little stronger, if I hadn’t lost Derf, then I wouldn’t be defeated by Jack and I would not have shown you that pathetic part of me.”

“No matter how strong you are, there are always times when you lose, that's what it means to be human. You should not blame yourself for it.”

Louise said this trying to comfort Saito, to which he answer by shaking his head.

“No! no! no! no, this is not the time to invent excuses. We are at a point where losing means death, I cannot afford it, I have to protect you.”

“If that happens then I will also protect you!” She said trying to convince Saito.

“That’s not the case!” Energetic Saito said.

“B-, but what you’re saying is wrong, that's the way a mage and her familiar should take care of each other, isn’t it?

“That would be pathetic.”

Louise raised her lips as she watched Saito heavily saying this.

How is it that the sweet air of sweetness that had cost so much work to get was easily gone. They had returned to the days when Saito always inflate Louise’s cheeks because of the anger that caused by him.

*You said that even if you’re next to the girl like me? * tch *, and then I would lock you in your own world where no one else can see you.*

However, Louise was not really angry about it, if it’s Louise before, a situation like this would have caused blood to shed from Saito's head, but ...

Maybe it's because we have already shown our skin to each other, thought Louise.

It was when Louise realized once again because they had strengthened the ties between her and Saito ...

And that's why, *I won’t be mad by something as simple as this* ...

Then Louise put her cheek gently on Saito's shoulder.

Meanwhile, he was still lost in thought.

I ... I need to get stronger!

Due to his defeat, all the frustration built up inside Saito caused him to forcefully clench his fists.

Having finished observing what happened between Saito and Louise ... Henrietta got up and then said quietly:

“They seem to be very well.”

Agnes continued her fresh face without saying a word. Then as if to turn around and retrace her steps, Henrietta decided to leave.

Then in a voice slightly rigid, Henrietta asked Agnes:

“We have to do everything at our disposal to stop the crusade!"

“That's right.” Agnes showing her full support to what Henrietta said.

Chapter 4 - Strategy

Within the darkness, Tabitha found herself sitting on a bed. It has been a day since the time she had regained her consciousness and realized she was on a room.

At first glance, this place could be mistaken as a simple bedroom, however, this had no windows and only had one door. The door looks tough and heavy, and it seemed to be locked from the outside.

The strange furniture inside the room could be distinguished as high quality but ... one could not help but think that this room had been built to confined an aristocrat. In short, it was a prison.

The solid door remained unchanged no matter what she did. Tabitha realized this when her wand was taken, and now she was just a small and helpless child. She remembered clearly how Julio had caused her to lost consciousness, as well as just before collapsing, she had seen that girl with a face like her ...

She knew from the first moment she saw her, that she was not created by magic. *Is she my twin?* Tabitha wonder, though she had never heard of the existence of her sister ...

Then at that moment, suddenly she remembered the stories about the taboo that remained within the royal families of Gallia. *For the twins, only one should be chosen to preserve the family name ...*

If so, that means the person I saw that day was ...

Anyway, there’s no doubt about it, it was all part of the conspiracy of Romalia.

What happened to the garden party? What is happening out there? What has become of Sylphid? What about my mother? Isabella? What have they done to my friends from Tristain?

In truth all these concerns overwhelmed Tabitha, however, at this time there was nothing she could do.

By looking closely, one could discover at the base of the heavy door a smaller door that was part of the structure itself, and right on the floor in front of that tiny door, Tabitha discovered a platter with bread and dried fruit served with a pitcher of water at its side.

She realized that the little hole was where they provide her food for now.

“There’s no doubt, this place is a prison.” Tabitha was totally convinced.

It had been a whole day since she had been confined in that place but still the biggest mystery that haunted Tabitha's mind was: “What will Julio and his evil master achieve by capturing me??”

At that moment she heard a grumbling sound, "GGRRRRRR," from her stomach. In fact, if she had not heard it, Tabitha would not remember that she had not eaten anything for over 24 hours ...

Almost instinctively she reached out the food found right outside the door. *They may put poison on the food.*She thinks back, then Tabitha immediately returned the bread bowl to where she found it.

Right after that, Tabitha began hearing something from the hallway. There were footsteps making their way towards her. Upon hearing this, the body of Tabitha immediately reacted and quickly she prepared herself.

She heard the sound of the bolt being withdrawn, and then, with a loud screech the heavy door began to open. The one who appeared was none other a handsome young man whose face she had already observed in a lot of occasions, but despite the familiar face, Tabitha couldn’t help but feel a little surprised.

Although she knew it was not shocking that he was the one who, from the beginning and behind the scenes, had planned this whole charade, however, presenting himself directly before her was something that had never crossed her mind.

“First of all, I offer my deepest apologies for what happened.”

Tabitha could only watch Vittorio quietly and intently as he continued. That young Pope seemed to have no problem approaching before her as he wore a casual linen robe.

The only place where the Pope could exhibit such an appearance would not be other than the mansion that had been commissioned for the Romalian government where the ambassador resided.

Then this must be it. This must be that mansion, because if it weren't, it would be impossible to build a room like this one without her knowing it.

Though she seemed to hold true hatred against Romalia but at some point they had shown great kindness to her and without his help, she knew it would be impossible for her to be proclaimed as queen.

If she was honest with herself, she couldn't deny that she had seen it coming: *the possibility of Romalia taking actions as excessive as this, but they have gone so far as to prepare a substitute for me. Their decisions completely exceeded my imagination.*

That said, the fact that she had fallen completely into their trap and was unable to offer any resistance against the ploy ... Although Tabitha did not want to accept it, she knew that it was all because of her lack of preparation.

"What have you done to Sylphid?"

"She is asleep in the next room."

"Where are we?"

"We are in Lutetia, in the mansion assigned to the Romalian ambassador." Vittorio informed Tabitha with a calm, almost indifferent tone. Yet, Tabitha came to the conclusion that he wasn't lying, but also she realized something else. The fact that she found him at this very moment talking so candidly with her, could only mean that the young Pope would not allow her to return to the outside world.

"Who's that girl?"

"She's your twin."

Tabitha's eyes opened wide in shock. Although she had concluded that this was the most likely answer, to hear the frank reality being revealed to her, she had been in shock well above expectations.

I am not the only child. I have a sister with the same face, more like myself... However, this was not the time to worry about that.

“What do you intend to do with me?”

“I only wish you to provide me a bit of your time to accompany me on a trip.”

“A trip?”

Tabitha never have imagined such a response in this situation.

“Correct.”

“Where do you intend to go?”

“Our destination is the mountain of the Fire Dragons.”

“Is that the place where you intend to kill me?”

“There’s no need to make such assumptions. It has never been my intention to kill you; in fact, it would be our greatest pleasure if you would become our ally. I would like you to consider what I'm asking and please try to reflect about it. Also, I would like to apologize in advance for our disrespect in addition to all the unrest we have caused so far...”

Tabitha just remained silent as she watched the Pope, the pale light reflecting from the bottom of her eyes looked as if to say to this: *"I’ll never cooperate with you, I'll never be a part to any of your plans."*

“Certainly you seem to hate us.” Vittorio said to her while outlining a smile on his face.

“I’m not foolish enough to help a religious fanatic,” Tabitha said without hiding her hostility. After hearing this, Vittorio answered while shaking his head.

“It is our duty to recover the holy land.”

“And for this purpose you think it is acceptable to kill anyone who gets in your way?”

“On the contrary.“ Vittorio said answering the question of Tabitha immediately, he said in a voice so quiet it was almost unbearable.

“What are you trying to say?"

“That's something you will understand if you help us, and that's why we must go to the mountain of the dragons.”

“I'll never be able to understand what goes through your disturbed mind.”

“Tell me, don’t you believe in legends? You see, it would be correct to say that these legends and faith do not share any relationship, or am I wrong?”

Tabitha thought for a moment to what Vittorio had said and nodded. Then Vittorio finish his words.

“I think the same; the essence of faith is to trust someone else in both the body and the soul. And by the time you get carried away too much, you’ll end up losing your sanity. However, recklessly labeling someone as "crazy" is also dangerous in itself. Myths and faith, people detach from them and consider them lies and nonsense, and it is actually quite easy to. Even so, one must take into consideration that in the end both will always still be a small part of the truth.”

Tabitha could only remain silent as she stared at Vittorio.

“You are a person that seems to have a very strong heart. Even while we have this conversation, I presume that you are imagining a method to escape from here, probably a way to stop us, where these ideas should haunt your head over and over again because that's the kind of person you are. And it is for this reason, that I would like you to become our ally. And I hope that when we get to the mountain of the Fire Dragons, you will naturally be able to understand us and our faith."

In saying this, Vittorio seemed serene without any hostile intent in his speech. It was like he was totally confident that things would go as he supposed.

“Did you used magic on me? Are you manipulating my mind right now?”

“You see, God resides within the hearts of people. As his servants, it is our duty not to soil the place where he resides.”

What the hell, what bring brings so much confidence to believe that he can persuade me?

He, from the beginning, has been an elusive character but it seems that every time I see him he becomes more and more mysterious. This thought caused a slight tremor to shake Tabitha's body.

The one who waited by the door the moment Vittorio was about to leave Tabitha's room, was none other than Julio.

He gave Tabitha a graceful bow before heading to his master.

“His Holiness, a report has come from the observation group that was sent to the Mountain of Fire Dragons.”

“Show me please.”

After receiving the report, Vittorio took time to review it carefully.

“It seems there are no changes from the previous results.”

“That means we only have four days,” Vittorio affirmed.

“So would it be desirable to send an invitation to *them*? Currently, I have someone who closely monitors their actions but...” Julio said with a straight face, in response Vittorio shook his head.

“I really don’t think that's necessary.”

“So we will still keep it hidden? I don’t think there is a benefit even for us to keep it secret.”

“If we could, there’s still a chance. But I can only hope they will still believe us, otherwise there is no choice but to dispose of them.”

“Hmm..”

“There is something I want to show, and although it reveals the unforgiving truth

... Do you think they are still suspicious of us?” Vittorio said in a tired voice,

which was something really unusual, as this pope was rare to showed a face full of concern and regret as he did right now.

“Who knows, it may still be the case...”

Julio also showed an attitude full of concern.

“Leaving this issue aside, it is certain that they will at least chase us to rescue their friend, whom we've replaced."

“I guess, they still haven’t realized that we have replaced their friend.”

“They have realized it, and that is because they are our "brothers". And if they are not capable of seeing through a ploy at this level, then we are in trouble."

At that moment, a servant came hurriedly with a plate of food in her hands. She gave a bow to the Pope, then as Julio opened the little door found at the base of the heavy door, she entered the plate of food inside the room.

Then, the young servant bowed again to the pair and made her way back from where she came.

While the girl left out of sight in the corridors, something was hanging around her waist, the brightness of a small knife that one might believe she used for self-protection.

The report was sent by Isabella, reporting that she had finally figured out the whereabouts of Tabitha, it arrived four days after the beginning of the garden party. It was a letter of a single sheet, which had been delivered to Henrietta’s room in the evening.

The letter has no sender written on it, and its contents consisted of long lists of seemingly meaningless numbers. Then, using the sheet with the code provided by Isabella, Henrietta began to decipher the message.

Her Majesty Queen Charlotte, remains captured in the mansion of Romalian minister, Barberini. Tonight at 8, I would like to have a conference in order to plan a rescue mission.

At the end of the report, Isabella's initials were written on it. Henrietta’s mood turned bad upon receiving this type of news. *She had to inform the organizers of Gallia, she would have to apologize for being unable to attend the night of the great banquet. She also has to gather all his trusted men in her room, And so, expect a visit from Isabella.*

Those invited to Henrietta's room were: Louise, Saito, Guiche, the friend of Tabitha: Kirche, and Agnes.

“Did they find the place where Tabitha is?" Saito asked upon entering the room, and Henrietta nodded to his question.

“Yes, that’s what it seems.”

Soon after hearing the message, Guiche started to kneel with one knee on the floor next to Henrietta.

“Let me take care of this matter, no, let me correct: Please allow this brigade commander of the Ondine Knights, to be in charge of executing the rescue mission, to safely return Her Majesty Queen Charlotte!”

Because of such statement, Saito tried to stop Guiche.

“Hey! Hey! Hey! Could you tell me how would you plan accomplish that? Keep in mind that we are talking about the mansion of a minister. Besides, once we go inside, we'll be in the territory of the Romalian Embassy. It would be crazy to try to enter through the front door and try to confront them.”

“Yes, Saito is correct,” Kirche said nodding to Saito's statement. “We have to infiltrate stealthily and quietly rescue Tabitha ... And if I remember, that's not how you work, right?”

Gulp Guiche could not remain silent upon hearing Kirche.

“Ehhhh... Fighting clean and fair, defeating your enemy by fighting him face to face. This is the correct way an order of knights performs their duty.”

“No! Do not even compare this to what we did last time in Alhambra. You have to take into account that we are now at the center of a city. If you do something that catches their attention, you will be captured immediately.”

Henrietta also sported approval to Kirche's warnings.

“And that's because we cannot consider all authorities in Gallia our allies.”

At that moment they heard a voice echoing from behind the door.

“Your humble servant, Isabella Martel, asks for your audience.”

Upon opening the door, Isabella came into view wearing an evening dress. The first thing she did was to approach Henrietta and offer a respectful bow.

“Is it really alright to come and visit us this way?" Henrietta asked. After finishing her greetings, Isabella nodded indicating that there was no problem.

“In fact, I was assigned by the government of Romalia a task to keep an eye on you all.”

A sudden tension began to flow throughout the room; Guiche reacted first holding his wand in his hand.

“I wish you did not misunderstand. I’m still one of your allies. I can assure you that any form of cooperation to help Romalia, was only for the sole purpose of saving my cover. And so, because Romalia intended to keep an eye on you, I used that excuse so that I can visit you openly without arousing suspicion.”

From that moment, Isabella began to explain the situation to all those present.

“To put it plainly, the possibility to rescue Her Majesty from the Embassy is almost impossible. We studied hard but still ... the level of security that is held in the Prime Minister's mansion is almost ridiculously high. Magical barriers and several traps have been prepared to guard the place, and that at all times, a company of Templar Knights is responsible for securing the perimeter of the mansion. The only way to make a frontal attack successful, is having a force three times greater than what we have at this time.”

After hearing this, the face of everyone present was filled with dismay. If they were to unleash a scandal of this magnitude right in the middle of the city, it would be catastrophic. Everything, including the odds, was against them.

“And perhaps the most important consideration of all: it is known that the Pope himself is constantly seen in and out of that mansion.”

“As a result, more stringent measures than normal must have been assigned to the mansion. Surely there will be a much larger amount of soldiers if you count all his escorts,” Henrietta muttered while her eyebrows furrowed.

“What if we infiltrate secretly and rescue her?" asked Kirche.

“Taking into consideration the strict security and the number of soldiers at our disposal, quite frankly, it would be impossible. One of my most loyal soldiers, Chikasui, could infiltrate the mansion but that would be the limit. Also taking that into account, it would be impossible for Chikasui to rescue Her Majesty alone.

“.....”

Then came a sudden silence in the room.

Saito, briefly thinking what he had thought, lifted his head and prepared to say:

“We can only rescue her on the instant they decide to transport Tabitha to another location.”

Then Isabella nodded to Saito's proposition.

“That's right, it would be illogical to think that they can keep Her Majesty locked up in that mansion forever. Surely, there must come a time when they plan to move her to different location. And then we have to aim at that time to rescue her; that's the only option left!”

At that moment ... From behind the door a resonating voice was heard again, belonging to who seemed a lady of the court.

“I come to deliver a message.”

“What could it be?”

Louise quickly opened the door and met a lady of the court. In a hurry, the lady started to convey the message.

“Apparently, tomorrow morning His Holiness the Pope have to make a sudden return to Romalia. And that's why, a farewell ceremony has been planned for him. Therefore, we cordially invited Her Majesty, Henrietta, to attend as a guest of honor at the ceremony tomorrow.”

Louise then went to Henrietta, her face reflected the tension she felt. Henrietta then gave a positive response to the invitation offered only a moment ago.

Along with the sound of the door closing, Kirche's voice was heard:

“Though we are still celebrating the feast in the garden, it is quite strange that the Pope decided to return to his country at this time.”

At that moment, Isabella realized something and immediately informed everyone:

“Will it be ... Did the Pope intended to take Her Majesty along with him to Romalia ...?”

At that time all present showed a face of surprise.

“If the Pope intended to take her with him, it was certain that Tabitha will be with him at the ceremony tomorrow,” Kirche said in a overwhelmed voice.

“He knows that it would be dangerous to keep her for a long time even within Gallia,” Guiche replied.

In the current situation, Isabella immediately set out to make a decision.

“I will prepare some clothes, so I would like you all to have a change clothes."

“Huh?”

“Tomorrow morning, we will split into two groups. One group will be among the crowd bidding farewell to the Pope, the other will be waiting near the mansion of Minister Barberini. In case Her Majesty were to be found in the Pope's group, and if we have the opportunity, we will rescue her. This plan is our best possible chance. I will also use the full strength of my squadron knights.”

“Whaaat? We alone are enough to handle this!“ As usual, Guiche exclaimed, failing to consider the difficulties that surrounded this mission.

“That would be impossible! You as a foreigner have a disadvantage of not knowing the terrain layout. Do not worry! For us to act accordingly, I'll be sending an emissary of my highest confidence to report the conditions clearly and concisely. Also, please be so kind to follow their directions,” Isabella said, ending their conversation.

Chapter 5 – Confession of the Pope

“Seriously, seeing all these guards, I’m sure we could never do anything against them.” said Guiche.

Hundreds of Templar Knights were stationed lining up in front of the mansion. It really did a show which was qualified as "too exaggerated".

The next morning... Saito and the others were able to get right in front of the official residence of Vittorio, thanks to the uproar caused by the citizens of Lutetia, who had taken the streets looking for an opportunity to see the Pope before his return to Romalia.

Saito, Louise, Kirche, and the Ondine: Guiche, Reinald and Malicorne.

Henrietta was in a reserved seat at the official residence that was prepared for her as a guest of honor. Near Henrietta was the representative of the Ondine, Gimli as well as Agnes, who were doing their duty as escorts for the Queen.

So, the group to perform the rescue mission was Saito and company.

It was true that if Saito and others were not involved in the farewell ceremony, this would raise a suspicion by Romalia, and that is why Isabella devised a plan for this not to happen. She used "Skillnir". These puppets, which were sprayed with the blood of owner she wanted to mimic, transformed immediately into an identical copy of the owner of the blood used, thus preparing perfect double.

Previously, thanks to Myoznitnirn, they had already proven the effectiveness of these dolls. Having seen one of these magical objects, they had been able to produce a walking doll identical to Siesta. Even Louise and company, had been able to experience it first-hand, the fearsome potential possessed by such tools.

Considering the current situation, they should be treated with the highest standards of accuracy, any error however small, without a doubt would

inevitably be discovered.

Saito and the others were looking for a dress which would not attract any attention. So, they decided to dress up as monks.

Actually, if you think about this setting, the robe of monks had a hood that covered their entire head. These were the perfect attire for those who wished to hide or go unnoticed. Truly, a very useful tool for a situation like this.

“Is it true that we can see Tabitha here?” Louise asked with a voice that reflected her concern.

“I'm sure we will. For Romalia keeping a captive like Tabitha, they’re like carrying a barrel of gunpowder everywhere. It is logical that they will not take the risk to keep this up for a long time as they still have some degree of disadvantage in another country. That is why, I'm certain that the Pope planned to take her with him back to Romalia,“ said Kirche. Guiche, with a simplistic voice, said without any hesitation of a terrible possibility:

“But, why would they keep her alive? If she was in their way, would it be a sufficient reason to eliminate her?”

“Guiche...” said Saito. Guiche was rebuking his lack of tact but still continued with his words:

“It's like ... It doesn’t really make sense to fight for someone who is no longer alive...”

“Why are you thinking like that?...“ Saito said with a shocked face, thinking the more appropriate words to say while looking at Guiche.

“What I said may be true, but we have to think about the worst case scenario and prepare for what we have to do in the event that this happens. That's the only way to prevent unnecessary sacrifices. Tell me, would you risk the life of your subordinates to someone who was already dead?” Guiche said with a face completely serious.

“Ehhh...” Saito could only nod silently.

“Certainly, it is as Guiche said, but I'm sure Tabitha was still alive.”

“Tell me, how can you be so sure?”

“I decided to believe in it from the beginning, and besides, no matter how long we wait we just have to keep hoping. For now, we just have to wait and see what Chikasui has to say, I think she was a Chevalier member of North Parterre, right?"

“What if she was murdered what would you do then?” Reinald asked Kirche.

“I, myself, will be the one to kill all those Romalian bastards!” Kirche said without a second.

“Hey, if you do that it will start war.” Guiche said in a surprised voice.

“If so, one would have to take the initiative and make the first attack with all our strength.”

“You shouldn’t be saying things like that, it’s dangerous!”

“That would be the most obvious conclusion,” Saito could not think but conclude with these words.

If my friends and the most valuable to me were killed ... What should I do?

What if someone dared to lay a hand on Louise?

At that moment, Louise, who stood beside him, stared at the long lines formed by the Templar Knights. Being positioned in front of the mansion, each one wore a magnificent military uniform and all the troops were accommodated so that they formed one line to the right and one to the left. This scene made Saito remembered watching toy soldiers in his childhood. If Louise was killed by those guys ... Is the only option would be to go to war to take revenge?

Before he could imagine an answer to that question, the mansion doors were opened wide. Then, the loud cries of the people were heard as they saw Pope Vittorio, who had been finally present before them.

Afterwards, a lot of carriages appeared from the bottom of the avenue. They passed right in front of where Saito and the others and stopped in front of the mansion.

Inside the largest carriage were his secretary and the Prime Minister. Before entering to his carriage, Vittorio then addressed the people by waving and showing big smiles at them.

After that, the ranks of soldiers began to move slowly. Leading these soldiers were the Templar Knights followed by a large caravan of carriages, where the cabinet ministers and group of priests were boarded. Behind the Pope's carriage were 5 wagons which were apparently intended to carry their luggage.

So, with the carriages in the middle, what was left behind was a huge amount of Templar Knights who guarded the church members. The whole army was composed of about 500 units, it was truly enormous. As expected from an escort who secure the safety of the Pope.

“I cannot see Julio anywhere,” Saito said.

Apparently, Julio who always stood right next to Vittorio like a shadow, could not be found anywhere.

“Surely, he must be with the impostor who replaced Tabitha, they needed someone to keep an eye on her all the time, right?” Louise said. Saito nodded showing that he fully agreed with her.

“That’s correct!” A voice boomed from behind them, this led Saito to turned around, what he found was a young woman dressed in maid uniform, standing there watching, apparently Saito did not remember seeing her face before.

So without a second, Guiche and Reinald took her arms to hold her and take her to a nearby alley.

Then, Malicorne unsheathed his wand and immediately pointed it to the mysterious visitor.

“You! Who the hell are you?”

“I'm a faithful vassal of Isabella. She ordered me to act as a 'communicator' between you and the Order."

“What’s your name?”

“Chikasui.”

“How suspicious! Especially that skirt you're wearing...”

Malicorne then placed his wand to his mouth and began to lick it, he seemed to be a member of the committee of torture. However, that girl who called herself Chikasui bent her body showing her ability broke free and knocked both Guiche and Reinald. At the same time, she had taken a dagger at her waist and with a flick of her hands a slash of blade struck Malicorne's waist.

“Eehhh? Noooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo!”

Malicorne’s belt had been cut, and his pants were lying on the floor. In panic, Malicorne immediately reacted and tried to fasten it up again.

“My honor!... Don’t worry about me, my friends, it seems that my honor is still intact!”

Saito then stared at the girl closely.

“Chikasui??”

“Really? Don’t you remember the girl who brought you last time to Isabella?”

“Your face is different the last time we met.”

She hadn’t shown her childish figure as she did now. Saito looked at her and even the color of her hair was different.

“Well, I advise you not to think too deeply about it.”

Chikasui laughed for a moment and then her face turned completely serious.

It must be magic, but what kind of magic? Surely it is a magical “spell” to disguise oneself. Saito ended up convincing himself of it.

“Her Majesty Queen Charlotte and her family were induced into a deep sleep and then transported inside of one of those carriages.”

“I thought so.”

“Which carriage is it?”

Then Chikasui said quietly:

“The carriage of His Holiness the Pope.”

At the same time in the Palace of Versailles...

Josette watched worriedly at Julio who was about to leave.

“Do you really have to go?”

“I’ll be back soon, I promise.”

At that point, Josette repeatedly shook her head showing her refusal to the departure of Julio..

“I, I will be left alone, and I don’t know what to do if you are not with me.”

“But Lord Ballbelini will stay here, just follow his instructions until I return.”

“But I'm fine with you. I do not want anybody else.”

Then Julio, trying to comfort Jossette that seemed to start out a tantrum as if she were a little girl, said:

“I get it, when I return, I promise that we will always be together.”

“Really?”

“Yes, I'm serious. I'll be with you even if you do not want to.”

That said, the face of Josette seemed to come a little anger.

“Of course not, I always want to be by your side... but tell me, are you really serious?”

“Yes.”

After hearing this, Josette's face lit up with joy.

“Really?”

“I said it seriously.”

“If so, I will be patient.”

Julio kissed Jossette and then opened the window to see the approaching flying dragon of bright blue scales, which gave a mighty roar at the sight of his master *KyuWah!*

Afterwards, Julio jumped out of the window and held on to the back of the wind dragon. The dragon quickly began to climb out of sight in the vast blue sky.

With an uneasy expression on her face, Josette, now alone in the palace, saw from her window the winged dragon.

Meanwhile inside the carriage, Tabitha finally opened her eyes and saw Sylphid at her side, who remained asleep while whistling a gentle sound.

And in front of them, Pope Vittorio was reading a book.

“Oh! You’re finally awake.”

Vittorio closed his book and then turn his gaze towards Tabitha.

Inside the carriage, the windows remained covered by curtains, making it impossible to see from the outside what was happening inside.

Also, a magical device had been placed on the roof which emitted a dim light that shone quite well inside the carriage. Tabitha then placed her hand over the mouth of Sylphid.

Then, reading again the book he was holding, Vittorio said:

“Let me give you some advice, I would like you to put aside the idea of trying to fight or flee from here, this carriage is surrounded by two companies of Templar Knights, you are stripped of you wand, therefore, if you tried to perform any reckless action, you will surely be killed.”

Then Tabitha's eyes shifted to the book held by Vittorio.

“Does this book got your attention? Well, this is the proof of my faith, history often repeated in the past... The void users and their familiars ... and also, the four treasure rings. It would be convenient to say that they have always been the ‘four of four’. Why do you think they were called like that?”

Tabitha could only shake her head in response.

“After running away from his homeland, Founder Brimir took refuge here in this land, Halkeginia, and in this land, he got the power to move, to breathe, and turned something that was present here for a long time, and I assume you already knew what I'm talking about, right? The powerful spirit that we have been

calling "the former resident"... only few of us knew it. The power of water: the ‘WATER STONE’. The one used in the production of golems: the ‘EARTH STONE’. The ‘FIRE STONE’ that King Joseph used recently, and also ...

Vittorio then pulled a small bottle from his pocket, and there was some transparent crystal glowing inside it.

By shaking the bottle, crystal brightened even more. Then Vittorio released the crystal, it remained floating on his hand.

“This is a ‘WIND STONE’, we use this in order to raise boats in the air. For a wind mage like you, this should look familiar.”

After saying this, Vittorio then pointed his finger to the sky.

“Also, the reason why the continent of Albion kept floating, was because of the power of the ‘WIND STONE’, and I also assume you already knew of these facts.”

Tabitha couldn’t respond but to stared silently to Vittorio.

“The power of the ‘former resident’ was something that provides both greatness and fear. The nature of that great power was like an immense force with sharp fangs! The four of four must reappear in this world! However, until now they may have never been completed, so the miracle hadn’t occurred yet. But believe me now it’s different.”

Tabitha opened her mouth wondering, she was already immersed listening to the eloquent speech of the Pope.

“Now an impending crisis was looming, a terrible danger threatens to destroy us all, now is the time that four of four must be reborn... we must use all of our power to once again reach the holy land.”

“...a looming crisis?”

“Yes, and that's exactly what I planned to show you.”

Chapter 6 - Spirit Stone of Destruction

The Pope's caravan was at slow pace towards Romalia, their arrival was somewhat delayed. Unfortunately for them, the travel took 3 days, compared to just a day if they have used dragons for transport.

But one should take into consideration that the Holy Pope's visit was not anything. He must respond to the devotion of all those believers of Brimir that lived in villages they passed by. This was a primary task for those who had given the title of ‘Pope’.

However, if the Pope would stopped to give sermons in every person in his visit, the number of people would become endless. So, he only gave the blessing to babies, families who became faithful servants in the service of God and Brimir; and brave soldiers who served in the crusade.

For Romalia, they needed to continue with the developments of the crusade as soon as possible, so this visit of the Pope had a great and deep political gain.

So the fact that the Pope and his caravan were immediately surrounded by people at every village they stopped by, Saito and others found it extremely difficult to implement their rescue mission.

If they were to proceed in their plan now, not only did they have to deal with the Templar Knights, the people would also turn on them, and they would be immediately surrounded by enemies on all sides.

And besides, fearing a possible assassination, the escort staff of the Pope was in high alert not even an ant could slip through their impenetrable defense. Not even those rumored as Chevalier of North Parterre members seemed to made any move against the defense network of the soldiers assigned to directly guard to Pope.

It seemed that planning a move during the course of their journey was impossible.

Also, the guards of the Pope were always at the frontline, this would make impossible to setup a trap in advance. Thus, attempting a surprise attack when they were in the vicinity of a forest would be unsuccessful due to low number of soldiers at their disposal, compared to the vastness of knights guarding Pope.

So in the end, the progress in rescuing Tabitha was still stagnant.

Two days had gone by since leaving Lutetia ...

So if the Pope's caravan continued with their pace, they would be able to reach the "Tiger Highway" the next day...

Meanwhile at an inn not far from there, Saito and his group held a meeting on how to continue the rescue mission.

“Soon in that place, a huge number of people will gather to see the Pope, so being dressed as monks, and mixing within that crowd was just easy task. We cannot fail, failure is unacceptable...” Kirche said as she rested her elbows on the table proving it was a difficult task as she thought.

“But it has to be soon, we must rescue her before they reach Romalia or else, the rescue would be impossible,” said Reynald with a face completely seriously.

At the same time, Saito was desperately thinking of a solution but in the end the anxiety overwhelmed him. The idea of Tabitha just within his hand but couldn’t rescue her made him angry. Beside him was Louise, who kept her eyes closed, seemed to be really struggling thinking a solution to this dilemma, but still, she couldn’t think of any idea.

“Just as I thought, then we do not have any other option but to attack in the front, if we can attack with everything we have, in the end maybe one of us will be able to reach and rescue Tabitha,” said Malicorne while nodding at himself.

“That will be suicide! But then if there is no other option, maybe, we can just use the decoy plan.”

“Decoy plan?”

“Exactly,” said Saito.

“I will begin to make a scene near them to get their attention, then you just have to go after Tabitha...”

Without completing, suddenly a voice came from behind him.

“If you're the one to do it, then you won't get anything."

“Huh?”

When they turned back, what they found was a large muscular man standing near them. Immediately, all present, from within their monk robes, prepared to arm themselves with wands and swords.

“It's me Chikasui!” said the man.

“But you're a man?!” cried Louise.

“This person is certainly Chikasui!”

Behind him, Isabella appeared who was accompanied by another man. As expected, they wore monk robes whose hood covered their head and eyes.

When the man lowered his hood, Saito couldn’t help letting out an "Ahh".

It was the man during that time, on the river banks of Leilian, who pretended to engage in a duel with Saito in order to deliver a letter for Tabitha.

Then he turned his gaze to Saito, the man smiled.

“Long time no see.”

“You are...”

“The captain of the Knights of the Eastern Roses, Bart Castlemont,” Isabella said presenting him to all those present.

“The first time I heard it I still couldn’t believe it,” declared Castlemont as he watched Isabella with a cold stare. “But, upon seeing that young girl who now bears the royal crown, I'm forced to believe it. She couldn’t be Charlotte-sama!

We, at all costs, must recover the true Charlotte-sama and restore the throne that is rightfully hers! And so, because of all your invaluable help, I thank you deeply, Tristanian Knights.”

Castlemont then addressed Saito and the others and offered them a bow.

Afterwards, Isabella started observing all those present around her.

“All right, then I shall begin to explain the composition of our men. First, considering the order of command of Chevalier of North Parterre, including myself and Chikasui, there were a total of 7 members. The rest of the order were now monitoring the caravan of the Pope to keep us aware on the situation. Also, the members of the Rose squad knights commanded by Castlemont consist of 20 men."

“Our members don't have experience in actual battle, however... each and every one of them have sworn their allegiance.”

All those present then began to stir.

“We are also accounted. All belonging to Tristain Ondine Knights, counting commander Guiche, there were 4 members, and among them is the one who was named the "Hero of Albion", Chevalier Hiraga-dono. Also, those two were friends of her majesty. Thus, our total force combat consists of 33 mages.”

“I would say, it’s a very good number,” said Guiche with voice of complacency.

“Very well, then as for a commander... Tell me, there isn't any problem if I will be the commander, right?” Isabella said with a serious face. All those present gave their approval.

Certainly, no one within the group has any reason to object. Besides, leaving the command to the leader of the order of Knights of North Parterre, whose specialty was dirty work, was the best possible option.

“Alright, let's start with the planning.”

Isabella then spread out a map on the table.

“Right here, we will take our position and begin the assault against the Pope's

caravan. Our sole purpose is the carriage of the Pope, who ever arrives first will be responsible for rescuing her majesty. After that, he must go on this path where we have already prepared a wind dragon. Finally, he and her majesty must then flee in the direction of Lutetia.”

Then with a skeptical face Guiche said:

“Are you trying to say that with only a handful of men, we will make a direct attack against two full companies of Templar Knights?"

“Precisely.”

“We will be annihilated! They will surely destroy us!"

“We cannot consider "team work" in this plan because all present here came from different nations with their own different ways of organization. So, running a precise and flawless plan was frankly impossible, the only possible option left is to buy time for someone to get into the carriage and perform the rescue, then that someone will take care and safeguard the Queen and bring her safely to Lutetia.”

“You might be right, we don’t seem to have any more options.” Castlemont said while nodding to Isabella.

“We are a squad of knights, there is a different way for us to act on frontal attacks. We cannot lose here, if we fail we will end up making things worse, we must give all that we have to make sure that won’t happen.”

Saito then said as he raised his head thoughtfully.

“I’m against this plan.”

“What did you say?"

“This will result to unecessary sacrifices. We will all have to die first before being able to save Tabitha.”

Louise also agreed with those words.

“Saito is correct.”

“But then what choice do we have?” Guiche said as he bent head.

“There should be another way.” Louise then directed towards Guiche.

“If Tabitha was not rescued here, it is likely that a terrible war might break out. If that happens, a lot more people will die in the end, is that what you want?”

Taking those account, Saito then began to notice each one of those around him. All appeared to be quiet, however, in their eyes he could see a complete resolution.

Then after seeing the nervous faces of Malicorne and Guiche, Saito finally understood:

"It seems that the one who is being naive...is me."

Everyone here had already prepared themselves for what lies ahead.

At that time, he desperately wanted to reach and take the hand of Louise, slowly moved his hand to her, but then stopped. It was a cruelty that he was about to commit, it was pretty obvious that everyone here also wanted to be able to hold the hand of his/her dearest, what he would do might be totally unfair.

But then, are we really engaging in this battle?

Do we even have a chance of winning?

Then from within his heart, Saito shook his head.

It's useless!

We cannot beat an enemy that exceeds us 10 times in numbers, and moreover, they were not ordinary enemy, they were the Templar Knights. Considering the experience of all of us in real battle conditions, we are still weak and naive.

...Indeed, it would be useless to fight ... Before we can even approach the carriage, magic attacks would already be fired upon us, there is the possibility tha most of us survive. In that case, we can rescue Tabitha and run... But the Templar Knights have Pegasus, though we use dragons to escape they can still chase us mid-air, certainly it would be impossible to get rid of them... the

chances of this might work were almost zero.

But still, even if the chances were zero, if at that time the luck was on our side, Tabitha could indeed be rescued. The only thing left is to go for that small gap that would open during that miraculous event. As expected to the Halkeginian nobles, when it comes to this, their resolution was unwavering.

But I...

Saito looked at Louise.

And then watched his comrades as they had been prepared to die.

I don't want to die, I will not let them die.

After thinking this Saito started to say:

"This is not right, it's not like I don't understand what you've said, however, we will all die here: it may be true that the war would stop with our sacrifice but... it is more likely that we may not succeed, or rather we will surely fail. How is it that you agree with a bet so dangerous?"

"I never thought to hear that from the man who faced the 70000 soldiers alone." Guiche said in surprised voice."

"The circumstances are completely different back then, since I was the only casualty. At this time we are talking about the lives of everyone. Surely, I understand your reasons for we must do it to avoid greater evil, but, even after knowing that, I still don't want to see my friends die in vain before my eyes."

Again silence flooded in the room.

"Well then, what do you propose?" Isabela asked, breaking the silence in her own.

Then, at that time, Saito could remember those words spoken by Pope Vittorio.

"We must negotiate with the elves, and placed our power behind our backs."

Of course, if negotiation was not enough then it would be favorable to start a

war.

But at that point the Pope thought there was still a room for negotiation.

So with this renewed thought, Saito started to say:

“Let’s try to negotiate.”

“Impossible! What position did you have to start a negotiation? You know that the only thing they really wanted to do was to start a crusade, it seemed that you don’t really understand them,” said Castlemont, to which Saito became silent while pondering, then asked Louise:

“Tell me Louise, can you create a large army using ‘illusion’?”

“For that power, I could but...”

"Well," Saito nodded in satisfaction.

The next morning...

The assigned group to lead the Pope's caravan, was none other than the order of Arieste Knights of the Church, which was commanded by Carlo Trobontino.

After spending almost an hour after they left the last village, they reached an area of land that seems like a vast wasteland. Shortly, they arrived at the foot of the Mountain of the Fire Dragons. And soon, they would travel to the route which joined Romalia and Gallia, the 'Tiger Highway'.

Meanwhile, being in a state of a dream, Carlo recited a sacred hymn as he could almost see the illusion of the crusade that dwelt in his mind.

By his sacred magic, he imagined those hated elves burning until they were reduced to ashes; his chest dwelled with joy.

In this state, while immersing himself in his sick fantasies, his subordinates were already shaking and urged him to look in the location directly across from them.

“Commander!... See there!...”

“What? Behave vile worms! We are the distinguished gentlemen of the church!”

As he said this, Carlo then fixed his eyes in the direction pointed to him. He ended up losing his composure.

“What the hell? Are those...?”

In front of the about 500 mails away, he saw the ranks of several thousand troops, even at that distance, he could clearly distinguish the cannons from the cavalry.

“Stop! All Stop!”

Then, Carlo stopped advancing his own pegasus, all of his troops immediately halted. Afterwards, a messenger was urgently sent to the place where Pope was to inform him of the situation.

“What the hell, where did these morons came from? How dare they to stop the advance of his holiness the Pope...”

At that time, the sharp eyes of one of the subordinates of Carlo distinguished their banner.

“Is that ... The coat of arms of the lords of southern Gallia?”

“The Southern Gallian gentlemen you said!?”

What the hell are they thinking, marching right in front of us and stopping our progress?

But the southern lords who fought at the frontlines in the previous war, were supposed to be allies.

At that time, from within the marching army, the figure of 3 men on horseback came out to meet them, one was carrying a white flag and slowly approached the caravan.

“They were asking for a truce!”

“Truce? Did they seek a war? To wage a war against us, the army of God!? Repent, thousand times damn!"

While trembling with rage, Carlo prepared his troops as he pulled out his wand.

The suspected trio then stopped about 20 mails away, standing right in place where Carlo can clearly see them. One them, taller among the other two, dared to took a step in the front.

“I presume that this was the caravan of his holiness the Pope. I am the captain of the order of the Eastern Roses, my name is Bart Castlemont! And I have to proclaim to His Holiness the Pope that we demand for his immediate surrender! We must reclaim what is respectfully ours!”

While shaking with rage, Carlo responded:

“You dare to obstruct the passage of his holiness the Pope, this is BLASPHEMY! You have the guts of march all your troops behind our backs!? Are you stupid enough to start a war with us!?”

“My army has a sole purpose of getting back our master. So, if you don’t resist and returned our master, then we will immediately turn around and gladly escort you to the border.”

“Stop saying nonsense! No matter what petty reasons you have, by the time you bastards dared to raise your wands against us, we will immediately accused you of heresy!”

“Before accusing us of heresy, I would like you tell me who was the person currently sharing the carriage with his Holiness? Tell me, who has given you the authorization to take that person to your country? Depending upon your answer, I’ll immediately give the signal to attack you any moment!”

“Is that even a threat? Bastards! Perhaps you're saying that you’re trying to threaten his holiness the Pope!”

Then, Carlo prepared his wand to make an attack, at the time he took a forward step, a voice was heard echoing behind his back:

“What’s the commotion here?”

“His Holiness!...”

Without thinking, Carlo immediately bowed down. With a calm expression, Pope Vittorio glanced toward Castlemont, Saito and Chikasui.

Saito was nervous while he was being gazed directly by Pope Vittorio. The Pope seemed to be traversing in his eyes, as if looking directly into his heart.

Are we discovered?

The army behind him was no more than the "illusion" created by Louise, though it would certainly be impossible to tell the difference between this and the real army, those mere illusions were obviously unable to attack.

Could it be that another Void user like Vittorio, was able to see through it and expose its falsehood?

If they had been discovered, they would have to continue their previous plan around this wasteland, as Guiche and several gentlemen of Gallia were hidden waiting for the opportunity to make a direct assault, but it would be obvious that if compelled to do so now, any benefit granted by the element of surprise would be lost. At this time their chances for success seemed to have shrunk drastically.

Unable to do anything as the icy cold sweat began to drop at his back.

“His holiness!”

Saito then took off the hood covering his face, this sudden action had perplexed Carlo.

“You bastard!...”

However, the calm expression of Vittorio didn’t change at all, so Saito decided to continue with his words:

“Tabitha...no, I ask you to return Her Majesty, Queen Charlotte; she has nothing to do with the war you want to start.”

Vittorio's reaction was nothing but a smile. He didn’t even tried to deny the accusations brought against him.

“If you pledge your support for our plans, I will gladly return her.” With this, Saito became speechless. “You know, I'm not really concerned, it was never my intention to control Gallia nor anything of what's in it, my only goal was always to lead them in order to complete again the four of four.”

“Why are you so persistent with this crusade!? Is it really important to wage this war? You should stop all of these and forget the holy land!”

“There is a reason to take back the 'holy land'. If you allow me, I would like you to join us, for there is something that I wanted to show you.”

You’re still trying to convince me?, Saito thought.

It was at this time.

"Chikasui" who was on the far left, suddenly started to cast a spell. From the palm of his hand, a blinding light began to radiate, everyone was wrapped around the intense light.

Saito instinctively look away from the glare, just as Carlo and the Templar Knights around him covered their faces to protect them from the light.

As if expecting this move from Chikasui, it seemed that Castlemont was the only one who still regained his rapid movements.

As expected from the square-class mage of "wind", in a blink of an eye, he covered a distance of about 20 mails separating them. He quickly approached Vittorio, put the Pope’s arms on his back, and immediately pointed his wand on his neck.

“Don’t move!” Castlemont screamed as the confused Templar Knights were about to take their wands.

“Drop your wands!”

From that moment, Castlemont began to give orders to all those knights gathered there, the expression on their faces was totally alarming.

They hesitated to move, they kept looking at the Pope and at their wands.

Pope Vittorio was calm, and a warm smile was still on his face.

“Drop your wands! It's an order! Don’t force me to steal the life of his holiness!”

Then Vittorio started to say:

“Gentlemen, please do as this person says.”

At these words, the Templar Knights began to throw their wands to the ground. Chikasui hurriedly casted alchemy on these wands, and they began to melt.

Then Castlemont shouted to Saito who seemed to be confused on what was happening.

“Quick! Go to the carriage and rescue the Queen!”

Hearing that Saito turned back to his senses. Although he was against this hostage taking, this was not the time to ask questions, after all they were in the middle of a battle.

It was necessary for their goal, they had to set aside their emotions in order to make the most appropriate decision. He, himself, has been able to learn this hard truth, if not, he wouldn’t be able to save anyone.

“Eh, understood!”

Saito rushed to the carriage, opened the door and found inside, sitting next to each other, were Tabitha and Sylphid.

“You are...”

Saito then turned to a surprised Tabitha and said:

“I'm here to rescue you! We must hurry!”

“Kyui! Kyuikyui! I cannot believe this!” Sylphid screamed and hugged Saito.

“Sylphid, return to your dragon form and take Tabitha with you!”

“Understood!”

That said, Sylphid immediately returned to dragon form, took Tabitha with her mouth and mounted the queen at her back.

The Templar Knights saw their escape as Sylphid quickly ascend to the sky.

Meanwhile, their allies, who had remained hidden, began to approach the carriage.

“Saito! Are you okay?!?”

“Yes! Saito did it!"

Those were the knight members of North Parterre and Eastern Roses. One by one they began collecting the wands belonging to the Templar Knights, the next thing they did was to melt them with alchemy or split them into two. Carlo began to murmur as fury marked his face:

“Bastards!... You cannot even be considered as heretics, you’re just animals! You along with your entire family will suffer the inquisition, your name will not be heard as we will annihilate every last one of you!”

Addressing Carlo, Castlemont still kept Vittorio as hostage:

“Unfortunately, I don’t have any relatives.”

Every one of his companions was dedicated to disable one by one the wands of the enemy, however... The number of wands were an equal to the members of the two companies escorting the Pope, so destroying them one by one will take too long.

We have to gather them all in one place to securely hold them.

If the reinforcement came, we couldn’t stand a chance. So we had to take every possible opportunity to maintain this lead.

By the time they were about to gather all the wands of the Templar Knights...

Up in the sky, the shriek from Sylphid could be heard.

“Kyuikyui!”

Flying up in the sky, moving like a lightning strike, a wind dragon appeared before Sylphid.

The wind dragon began to chase the stunned Sylphid, with the sole purpose of stealing Tabitha.

“Julio!” Saito scream seeing the person riding at the back of the dragon, the one who was able to manipulate all beasts, Windalfr.

That dragon, manipulated by the familiar called the right hand of God, was tirelessly working trying to follow the movements of Sylphid to snatch his load.

“Flee in this direction!”

Not knowing if this instruction had reached her, Sylphid attempted to make a fast descend while Tabitha was still on her back, however, they couldn’t make it. As Azulo, showing a precise hawk like movements, and Julio was able to intercept them and snatched Tabitha.

Tabitha, not having her wand, was just a little girl; unable to put any resistance, there was no way she could change the situation she was now.

Holding Tabitha in its mouth, Azulo made a loud flapping sound and began to return to Romalia.

“Kyuih!”

Silphyd reached Saito, landing right next to him.

“This is bad!”

As Saito shouted this, he immediately jumped to the back of Sylphid.

“I'm coming too!”

By the time they were about to leave, Louise also jumped to Sylphid’s back, then followed by Kirche doing the same.

“Hey Kirche! What are you doing?!”

“I just thought you two cannot use ‘levitation’!”

Saito nodded for this, and then shouted:

“Go after them, Sylphid!”

"Kyui!" Silphyd roared and started to ascend.

“Hurry up! If they made it to Romalia, we’re in serious trouble!”

Sylphid flapped fiercely as Julio and Azulo looked like a point in the distance.

From the ground, Castlemont and company, as well as the Templar Knights, were still stunned seeing the spectacle in the sky, but... after a while, everyone prepared to ride their horses and pegasus and started pursue those two dragons.

“Damn! They’re really fast! Sylphid, can you fly faster?!”

“This is all the strength I have!”

Although both Azulo and Sylphid were wind dragons, the difference between them looked like a puppy comparing with an adult dog. No one could reach the speed of the wind dragon commanded by Windalfr.

“We're about to cross the border!”

Right in front of them, they could glimpse the enormous mountain ranges of the Fire Dragons, this was the ridge that stretched from east to west dividing Halkeginia ... And right behind those mountains was Romalia.

The moment they saw the wind dragon something horrible happened; leaving the mouth of Azulo, they saw Tabitha falling to the ground.

“Saito! Tabitha is...!” Louise issued a desperate cry.

Propelling like a somersault, Azulo swooped at full speed, and once again captured Tabitha in its mouth. Without changing its direction, Azulo continued rotating reaching an astonishing rate of fall.

“They did it on purpose, they just wanted to hurt Tabitha!” Kirche said desperately.

Upon hearing those words Saito’s heart was set on fire. If they continue with that

she could fall and hit the ground ... and yet they were playing with her small body as if it was a rag doll.

There was still a chance, an opportunity obtained by putting his life in danger, he will never allow them to escape.

“Come on! Sylphid!”

“Understood!”

Silphyd quickly began to shorten their distance, then Azulo tried to escape, but his speed didn’t increase.

“Attack them, Sylphid!”

“Kyuikyui!”

Silphyd prepared to attack with everything she had, however, Azulo swiftly dodge them, at that moment, Saito jumped while drawing his sword.

With his left hand, he was able to hang on at the claw of Azulo. Then following Azulo’s movements, he began to climb up and reach the dragon's back.

Having faster reaction time than Julio, Saito took him by the neck and pointed his sword.

“Get us down!”

Despite the situation, Julio kept his calm face.

“You’re just in time, come, I want to show you something.”

“You got to be kidding me!” Saito scream furiously.

“Oh God! ... you’re always acting like this, at least listen for once to what people have to say.”

“Do you expect me to listen to a selfish person like you? Always talking about the crusade, always clinging to that foolishness, just GET us down!”

As Julio shook his head "As you wish," was when he finally decided to land Azulo.

Upon reaching the ground, Saito immediately ran to where Tabitha was.

“Tabitha!”

“I'm ... fine.”

After leaving Tabitha in Kirche’s care, he turned once more to Julio.

“Hey Julio!”

“What now?”

“We need to talk.”

“Alright, honestly for once, I always wanted to have a little chat with you.”

“What’s your purpose, the reason for continuing with this crusade? Can’t you just live in peace and forget about the holy land?”

To hear him say that, the face of Julio seemed to emerge an expression from someone who has to help a friend in his studies because he always gets bad grades.

“We must find something necessary for our purposes in this world. Just think a

little, what do you think is the reason why we have repeated the war for the last 6000 years? If you look a bit, initially the people were still the same, they still fight just for a piece of barren land and for their pride ... Do you think that justifies all the blood that had been spilled so far?”

“I don’t know.”

“That's because we are in a situation where our hearts cannot find a support to cling to, we are in a situation where our "sacred land" has been stolen by the heretics, and then, what should we believe then?”

“So, that was your reason for starting a war against the elves?”

“Yes, for they have unjustly established a land that was rightfully ours from the beginning.”

“... Dammit, was that really a reason?”

For a few moments, Saito remained starring at Julio, then suddenly he began to laugh.

“A ha ha ha! Don’t look!

“What’s so funny?”

“Nothing, it's just that, I never really thought that petty reason would start this endless war. Really, it would be fine to just leave the sacred land alone. It’s really absurd to fight, you know. And it would be a hundred times, no, a thousand times more fun to just stay and play with your friends.”

“What did you say?”

Saito's face turned pale. *This guy is really getting in my nerves.*

“You insist on going in this endless crusade forever without giving any logical reason, by the waging a war against the elves over and over again, do you really expect to win if you only fight for honor? How many times have passed since your ancestors were displayed as a pathetic losers after failing to recover their land even after a millennia?”

“You... Perhaps, are you trying to mock me?”

Filled with rage, Saito then threw his fist against Julio, however, he nimbly dodged it smoothly.

“Hey! Hey! Do not get mad for something so simple, things will get very bad if you cannot even control your emotion like this.”

Saito could only keep seeing Julio with full hatred.

“You ... that’s what people like you always think, always controlling and treating us like idiots! Do you really look at all the people around you only as mere pawns?”

“Of course not, I never thought something like that.”

“Liar! What about that girl, Tabitha's sister ... when she wears that crown? What did you say to make her cheat? What did you say to her for her to betray her own sister? Surely, you've tampered her with a potion!”

Upon hearing this, Julio's face turned slightly serious.

“Potion? I would never use something like that.”

“Well, then what did you do? Or perhaps, do not tell me you...”

Saito bit his lip because of the thought that overwhelmed him.

“Are you trying to tell me you make this poor girl fell in love with you?”

Then, Julio opened the palms of his hands. It was really strange that this young man felt proud for himself in such a desperate situation.

“If I say yes, what will you do then?”

Saito was outraged by the hostile tone of Julius and began to respond.

“Damn ... You're the worst! How dare you use a woman who was in love with you ... seriously you are the lowest, I wonder what would your god do if he knew this!”

The color of Julio’s face changed at this.

“What did you say?”

His eyes were burned with anger and his grin had disappeared completely.

Demonstrating his contempt, Saito said as he lifted his lips:

“You, was it your "body and soul"? Or is it your god that tells you it's okay to use women in love with you, for your silly purposes?”

With quick movements, Julio reaction was to deal a strong hit in Saito’s face, which Saito swiftly pushed back.

“Think what you're doing, idiot!”

While recovering, Saito placed his hand on the hilt of his sword.

“Do you still want to continue?”

“What did you say about my own body and soul?!!”

Julio, without hesitation, then dealt a punch to Saito.

“Idiot!...”

In the time that Saito was about to draw his sword, he noticed what was in Julio's face, an expression such fury, that prevented him to control himself. This combined with the disappearance of that mocking tone which mocked anyone talking to him.

“Are you really try to face me, Gandalfr, unarmed and without using any beast?”

In truth, Saito didn’t have the slightest idea on what was going on, and apparently, Julio wasn't even considering the consequences of what he’s doing, but anyway, Saito never faced an opponent before who was unarmed.

After regaining his composure, Saito decided to throw away his sword, which was picked up immediately by a worried Louise.

“Saito...”

“You dare to talk about what's inside of my soul... You know nothing!”

The tone of Julio made Saito to remember those of his childhood bullies.

Then, Saito fought Julio with the fist of his left hand, and immediately after, in less than a blink, deal a direct hit with his right hand.

This seemed to have become a boxing practice, however there were times when the fight was becoming more serious. Without the power of Gandalfr, Saito was just an ordinary boy. He will eventually lose to this match due to shock.

However, the physical abilities of Julio were worthy of admiration, he could dodge Saito’s punches easily, then respond by throwing a kick, even so, Saito caught his leg and with all his strength pinned him down and then began to strike punches one after another right in the beautiful face of Julio.

But then, the attacks of Saito didn’t last for so long, as Julio took one leg of Saito and then turn his body skillfully, thus changing positions.

Their fury seemed to have lasted forever, exchanging punches again and again. In such a display of tenacity and fury made Louise, Kirche and Tabitha speechless as they observed them in dismay, waiting to reach the conclusion.

Finally, both Saito and Julio were exhausted, they lay down and not being able to send another punch. The two of them had been in such a pitiful state as they seemed to be unrecognizable. Saito's face was completely swollen, and part of his left eye was hidden behind his swollen cheeks. For Julio, an endless stream of blood flowed from his nose, this combined with the deformation of his face which was caused by the immense swelling in his cheeks.

This had been a contest of fists, so it was obvious that the hands of those two contestants were completely destroyed, their hands was so swollen that even their little finger was twice its original size, those limbs were completely impossible move right now.

So while in the state of breathing laboriously, Saito started to say:

“... This is very strange of you, you, who made yourself lose your sanity.”

At this Julio answered revealing the pain.

“You know, I envy you.”

“What did you say?”

“You can love someone without having to worry about anything.”

“What are you trying to say?”

“What, you really thought I had no feelings? I have done a tremendous effort to avoid falling in love... And yet I fell for it, and not only that, I also saw the need of having to use it. I really believed that someone like you would be able to understand what's in my heart?”

“Well, I don’t understand the fact that it is "necessary" to use it.”

“That’s very unfortunate.”

“But then, use it for what?”

“Who do you think we're doing this for? For them, for everyone, for you ... We are doing everything for you, you who are living on this doomed earth.”

From that moment, Julio began to cry, * gushih ** gushih *, in his eyes tears flowed, he then started a plain sob.

For Saito, he never would have guessed that Julio was able to mourn, so he was really surprised.

Eventually after crying for a moment, Julio stood up. With a puzzled expressions, Kirche and Tabitha rushed to them. Both Saito and Julio, though poorly, were treated with some "healing". Apparently, it was not enough to completely stop the pain, but at least it served so they could calm for a bit.

Then Julio said brokenly:

“That’s enough, do whatever you want, I do not care anymore on how you guys would able live in this land, nor for everyone who always like to kill each other for just a small piece of land.”

“Julio, what’s wrong? What are you talking about?” Louise asked confused from

what she heard.

“See it for yourself,” said Julio with a voice that reflected his discouragement.

“What the hell are you talking about!?”

At the moment Saito approached Julio after saying this....

The earth began to shake.

* * *

Castlemont and the others, who still has the Pope as their hostage, were following the trail of Saito.

Right behind them, riding on their pegasus, the Templar Knights also followed closely, looking for answers.

One of the noble chasing the wind dragon has spotted Saito and the others, after using a ‘far-sight spell’, he shouted excitedly:

“They already landed!”

“Very well!” Castlemont said as his troops began to increase the speed of their horses.

After a few minutes...

A violent tremor began to shake.

“Uwa! An earthquake!”

As the knights lost their control on the horses, one by one they stopped, those horses started to panic as some of them began running, stumbling and inevitably ended up lying on the ground, even so the intensity of the shaking became stronger.

“It’s too violent!”

The shaking continued for a few moments... to then stop abruptly.

“That earthquake was so strong! I've never felt something like that before!”

At that moment, Castlemont heard someone muttering, it was the Pope. Pope Vittorio, who was mounted in front right next to him bounded tightly with magic rope, started to say:

“It has already started!”

“What did you say? What was already started?”

“The "Great Uprising" has begun!”

“What's that?”

At the time Castlemont wondered about this, a new tremor started and shook the earth violently, this new tremor was far stronger than before, the horses began to kneel, and even the soldiers who were on foot could not remain standing, as they felt the intensity of the earthquake.

“Hwuah!”

Castlemont was thrown from his horse, Vittorio also rolled after falling to the ground. Crawling quickly, Castlemont went to where Vittorio had fallen. The intense shaking of the earth felt like being swallowed in a violent storm.

“What the hell is going on?!”

Without answering, Vittorio only did was to observe something at a distance.

Castlemont then fixed his gaze in the same direction as Vittorio.

This time, he was completely speechless.

* * *

“Oi, what the hell was that?!”

Malicorne and Guiche kept their hands on the ground due to the intensive shaking, they soon noticed that Reynald remained staring in one direction.

“Hey Reynald, what's wrong?”

Reynald didn’t answer. He just raised his finger slowly and pointed forward. Seeing the disaster right in front of them, they were completely shocked.

So, because no one could explain what was happening, they decided to extend their hands and then pinched each other’s cheeks.

“It hurts!” Both Guiche and Malicorne said almost wanting cry.

“... This is not a dream!”

Both men from the North Parterre, Eastern Roses, and the Templar Knights ended up forgetting their precautions and hostilities they had with each other when they saw before their eyes, that gigantic and horrifying natural disaster.

As if remembering something, one of these gentlemen began to murmur:

“So, it’s true, the continent of Albion that was once part of Halkeginia...”

* * *

A tremendous roar emerged echoing in their ears, the increasingly strong vibration did not show any signs of stopping.

With a voice as if not believing in what he was seeing, Saito said:

“The mountain... is floating!”

The mountain of the fire dragon that he was ... this mountain, that was once a part of the great mountain ranges, began to ascend up in the sky.

It was a spectacle that could be described in one word: "Majestic".

As if there was a rocket pushing those mountains up as they unstoppably ascended towards the sky.

At the time the mountain was fully in the air, a furious cloud of dust rose from where it came from; the surroundings darkened as if the night had started prematurely. The same dust came in the throat of Saito almost suffocating him.

“What the hell was that... what's going on?”

Julio then explained it to Saito:

“This is the "great uprising", this happens when the gradual accumulation of wind stones began to raise an entire land mass.

“Wind stone?”

Certainly, they were used to raise "ships” to the sky, in addition for being a crystal that kept the power of the wind from the previous resident...

“... As you know, the lands of Halkeginia were rich of these wind stones. To put in simple words, a wind stone is a glass where the power of the spirits lies, so what happens is that it gradually crystallized into the ground forming a "spiritual power". So after tens of thousands of years, the amount soon be enough so that those wind stones will eventually raise the whole earth.”

“The whole earth, you say?”

Then Julio said in a tired voice:

“Unfortunately, right now a large saturation of wind stones were buried throughout Halkeginia, we soon be tossed like a pancake into the air and huge chunks of land will began to float. Do you finally understand? This is reason why we must reach the holy land.”

“Then why do you keep it secret all this time?!”

Then Julio replied as if spitting:

“Tell me, after finally seeing this, was it hard for you to believe in the sincerity of our words? An idiot not seeing things with their own eyes will never believe.”

* * *

After 30 minutes, the shaking subsided. With that, Vittorio, the Templar Knights, Castlemont, Guiche and company, together, they finally arrived to the place where Saito and the others were.

Apparently, what happen today in the mountain of the Fire Dragon, had came as a surprise to members of the Templar Knights, as they were confused not knowing what was happening.

“Are you surprised?” Vittorio asked Saito.

“Yeah ... this is the first time I saw a mountain rose up like that.”

After listening to Saito, a smile spread across the face of Vittorio.

“The land that has risen will gradually consume the power of the wind stones, so once again they will return to the surface. The continent of Albion is part of the remains of what has become the first ‘Great Uprising’.”

“What was really happening in Halkeginia?” Asked Louise with a worried face, to which Vittorio said while shaking his head.

“Actually ... It’s not all, according to research we have done personally, our estimate is that 50% of the whole land would rise up just like what you have witnessed, but there were some degree of error in our calculations, anyway, the damage to all the continent would be catastrophic, so within a few decades these types of events will began to occur throughout Halkeginia.”

“So, what you’re trying to say is that we will be left without a place to live by?” said Guiche in a shocked voice.

“Yes, it will not be today nor tomorrow, but in the near future, half of the Halkeginian population will lose the land needed to live, when that happens, there will be land conflicts, and a war with no real winners will began. And to prevent that from happening, we have awakened "the void", that is why we must recover the "holy land" that was taken from us by pagan elves.”

“In the holy land ... is there something?”

Vittorio then quickly answered that question:

“There is a giant magical device built by the founder, Brimir. The only one that can able to fight against this(spiritual power). We, the four of four who possess the power of "VOID", it is our duty to recover the Holy Land for our salvation lies in it so that we can rid of our land this threatening disaster!”

“This is something ... something important, why would you kept this hidden all this time!?” cried Saito as he clenched his fists tightly.

Seeing his reaction, Vittorio repeated the same words that Julio had said only a few moments ago.

“Do you really believe that anyone would even believe in a story like this? Unless they see it with their own eyes, people will never actually believe, and also, in the given case that we have told this story before, probably at least a few of you would say "Can we really believe what they said?", then rumors will begin to spread, which alone would lead to unnecessary panic among the people.”

That may be true, Saito thought to himself.

If I haven’t seen the truth with my own eyes, if I haven’t witnessed that such mountain could rise up to the sky, when I heard this story, I most likely would never have to believed it.

“See, I told you.” Julio said mocking voice.

“We must act "seriously", although this would cost us our lives, if it is to recover the Holy Land, we will do whatever is necessary, those words came from the mouth of the god, even Valhalla(Death) would cooperate to us in our crusade! The "great uprising" of today was what we might call, our letters of TRIUMPH, all of these were done with the sole purpose of us to believe!”

Vittorio then took Saito’s hand.

“Will you lend us your strength, Gandálfr? Everything is for the distant future, our descendants may live quietly in a safe land, which really belongs to them, no matter what happen in the crusade, our first priority now will begin with negotiations. If the elves peacefully return "the holy land", then there will be no problem, but if they don’t, we will continue initiating the attack, that would be our last option, we must fight for our right to survive!”

Saito and his friends began to look at each other faces.

As Isabela and Castlemont, Malicorne, Guiche and Reynald, Tabitha and Kirche, all evidenced in their faces that they did not know what to do.

The whole story was too incredible, too unexpected, while their heads still could not process what was really happening. But ...

The mountain floating in the sky right now, as they look up, it became the extension of the clouds in heaven showing how the unimaginable would turn into a reality, their reasoning were shaken uncontrollably.

But it was precisely for this reason that at the moment, they could not reach an agreement.

After what the Romalia had done so far, it was difficult to say whether they would accept to "cooperate" with them.

With these concerns clouding their judgment, Louise tried to calm Saito by taking his hand, and then head to Vittorio:

“We currently do not have the authority to respond to your request; so I ask to give us time to make our considerations, but before that, we have a few conditions.”

“Go ahead.”

“First, I ask that from this moment, that you won’t hide any information.”

“I promise.”

From that point, Louise looked at Tabitha.

“The next thing is, that the throne is restored to the rightful queen of Gallia.”

“I cannot do that.”

“Why?”

“Gallia is a huge nation, if you don’t have a queen in command, their moral in battle would not be enough to achieve victory,” Vittorio said in a calm voice as he could.

“But Tabitha can...”

Saying this Saito, Tabitha started to respond in her own:

“I, I intend to go with you.”

“Is that alright?”

“That was my intention from the beginning, the main reason I wear that crown was to help you, though I really don't like it, I still agree with the plan that the crown be given to the imposter sent by Romalia...”

Having said that, Tabitha then took the hand of Saito.

“Then it's settled.”

At that time, Vittorio began to look around.

“All of us here have seen, for the first time today that we shared here our truth and so, we have become true brothers! May the grace of God enlighten us in our future endeavors!”

All of the soldiers rose and began to see each other in amazement, however, after a time they decided to shake hands, and embrace each other.

Saito and others, who still had trouble accepting this, saw the how the things had become.

While he rubbed his face, Julio asked Saito:

“What's wrong, aren’t you satisfied?”

“Well it is, or rather, still I do not like the idea that in the end, everything was finished just as you have planned.”

“Do not say something like that, but things finished well atleast for my part, I really have to make a great effort to resist.”

“What do you mean?”

“All this would have been easier, if we only waited for the new void user.”

“Why was it not done?”

After hearing this, Julio replied as if sighing:

“I was excited.”

“To what?”

“I wanted to fight you. I really wished to face you. In order to achieve greatness, one must remove the obstacles, that was the way to solve the problems. However, I’m not really that strong, damn, if only I could be stronger, I would have been more preferable.”

Saito then stared Julio, his face was haggard, swollen everywhere and blood could be seen from either side of the handsome face of Julio.

Then he recalled his words of just moments ago:

"You can love someone without having to worry about anything."

That guy ... Although we have almost be the same age, he can act so casually, while hiding the truth in his chest. He was also reminded of his tears before. Totally crying like a small child.

“Idiot!” Saito said.

“That’s what I should say.” Julio said while his eyes remained fixed on Saito.

“By the way, I would like to apologize, for what I said before, about who owned your body and soul, but it is also your fault for your bad habit of always wanting to deceive people.”

“...I haven’t truly deceived people before.” He said in a dejected voice.

Then Saito turned his face away trying to avoid to look into his eyes, he decided to extend his hand to Julio.

“What is this?”

“A handshake, but this does not mean that I have already accepted cooperate with you.”

Julio watched that hand for a moment, but in the end, he corresponded strongly against his handshake...

Chapter 7 - Our Home

“Hurry up! You guys need to be more careful with that!”

In the deep Mons mines, located in the southern part of Tristain: right at the end of Tunnel No. 16, Eléonore, dressed in working clothes, was making a fuss.

In front of her, the guys from the Ondine were struggling with all they have to handle a strange machine.

The magical device was used to search the mines for "wind stones" lying in the interior of the earth.

After digging through the earth, in order to locate the wind stone deposits, a light in the device would indicate its relative position. The tip of the machine was then inserted into the ground, and the soil will then be expelled from its back, and thus opened the way for the boys.

This device had been designed in reference to the manner by which earthworms moved across the ground.

Normally the machine had a limit, which it did not allow a search to a depth greater than 200 mails. This device for wind stones research was modified by Eléonore herself, the chief executive engineer of Department of "Earth", Magic Research Institute.

By using this machine, they able to reach a depth close to 1 riig(kilomail). However, in exchange, those who operated it must constantly recite spells– in order to handle the device’s "remote". This type of operation must be performed with the extreme precaution otherwise, this may break midway, or there is a risk that it may stop to function completely.

So the guys of the Ondine who handled that device were nervously reciting the spell, as their foreheads remained soaked in sweat.

However, the reason why they were so nervous was commander of special search team, who was frightening and unbearable.

Until recently they managed to achieve a great distance, cooperating all together while reciting the spell needed for the remote control of the machine. However, for an order of knights who were not used to recite specialized spells, it was obvious that they would show great difficulty and commit constant errors.

“Damn! What secret mission is this?! At least they should have assigned with me a competent staff from the Magic Research Institute!” Eléonore said, as her anger was increasing.

Since returning from the garden party, Henrietta had given the order for the Magic Research Institute to begin an investigation in the wind stone mines. Also, they are specified to dig as deep as they could. Due the high degree of confidentiality involved in this research, it was decided to deploy the Ondine Knights to carry out this task.

And this was why Eléonore was so angry, throwing tantrums as she had to endure the young inexperienced group who don’t have the slightest idea on how make a true Academic Research. “E-Eléonore-sama ... We stopped,” reported Malicorne to Eléonore, while trembling.

The moment she heard this, Eléonore’s eyes were lit with anger.

“Hah? You! A while ago you also said that! So now you're saying it again? So tell me, what was your excuse now?”

Upon hearing this, Malicorne tried to answer in a low scared voice:

“B-but ... I, is that yesterday I didn’t sleep ... and besides, this work should not be done by a knight...”

A vein appeared to burst in front of Eléonore.

With a face that seemed to say, "Does this guy knows what he is saying?" Guiche observed Malicorne’s behavior. If anyone were to say all this kind of excuses in front of a woman like Eléonore, it was clear that it would just make her angry. At least for a hard headed person, who has an inexplicable confidence like Guiche, this truth was quite easy to understand.

As expected Guiche had something to say, but at the moment he was going to interfere with the conversation, Reinald managed to stop him.

“Wait, let’s just for observe for a while.”

“What do you say? Yesterday, you told me you received instructions about the mission you had to do today. And now you had the nerve to tell me you haven’t sleep yet? You don’t even have the shame to hide your carelessness!”

It was then when Guiche observed Malicorne’s face closely. "Uh!" he growled, Guiche found that his face was shaking... but what really showed the brilliance of his eyes, was a great and boundless pleasure.

“He anger her for purpose, and his technique is amazing!” Reinald said while his face tensed with shock.

From that moment, Malicorne started saying things like "Forgive me for being born" or "Sorry for being so irresponsible", each and every one of those excuses, were solely for the purpose of teasing Eléonore.

“AND I ... I'm tired, please give me a few minutes, Onee-san!”

As expected, after hearing this, Eléonore lost her patience.

Suddenly, she began to chant a spell that turned the tip of her wand into a whip, then she mercilessly whipped Malicorne.

“Vermin! Incompetent Pig! Good for nothing! And now you’re saying you are... Tired!? Tireeed ~!!”

“Hah! Forgive me ...! For being born ...!”

“A pig like you! Stop living, be buried and fertilize the earth!”

“Eh-pig! Burying a pig will the earth happy!”

Just when they started this "game", Saito returned from the top of the tunnel. He was pushing a wagon which rattled as he walked. For a non-magic user like Saito, the only work that remained for him was to bring outside those stones and soil that were expelled from the machine, he being the only one in charge of this

task it was extremely a heavy work.

Anyway, due to fatigue that caused by this task and because of the exhaustion of his legs, Saito stumbled and worse, ended up falling on Eléonore.

“Kyah!” Due to the force, Eléonore fell with her face pressed to the floor.

“F-forgive me!” Saito apologized.

Then, Eléonore rose slowly from the ground, her face was still covered in mud, her clothes were covered with dirt.

“Uwaa ~! The face of my Empress has been...! The mud covers the face of my Empress ...!” Malicorne began to say unnecessary words.

While Eléonore was wiping her face, an atmosphere of danger never before felt by Saito suddenly arise. This sudden terror had assaulted Saito, one that made him remember the Louise before, which made him pay 10 times as anything she had done, probably the best word to describe this type of woman whom Saito was facing is: "Merciless".

“You ... the only thing you want do is to make me angry right?”

“Please I beg you, forgive me!”

Before realizing it, Saito was already kneeling in front of her, this gesture was the only thing he had left to save his life, or at least, that was what dictated his body, that primitive fear assailed him in those moments.

“Now I remember, there are several things I have to talk with you, you say you are determined to marry a daughter of the Vallière, innn youuur dreaaams! Haha!...”

Hearing Eléonore's voice began to tremble, Saito thought hopelessly "I'm dead ".

“And you dare to do that to me!?... it seems unimaginable, but mostly... no matter whether it is a noble or a commoner, a man like you always exist...”

“Onee-san... you see... that was just...”

“Do you think that by raising your social status you have the right to do that!?”

So that's when Eléonore started to pounce her whip against Saito. In that time, Louise was present in that tunnel. She can only use void magic, so she had different orders and various other tasks. Louise was carrying with her a basket of lunch for everyone. Upon seeing Eléonore hitting Saito, she was surprised and ran immediately to where they were.

“Neesama! Eléonore-neesama! Calm down please!”

Louise hugged her sister, holding her by the hips. Eléonore in respond, only stared closely at her little sister.

“Louise! You came at a good time! Just in time!”

“Stop! Please!”

[Eléonore stares]

Louise instinctively stood firm after feeling the heavy eyes of her sister.

“Tell me, is it perhaps you don’t even have pride anymore!? How come you are with this unfaithful stray dog!”

At that moment Louise froze.

“Tell me Louise, perhaps you haven’t consider that moment, what would happen if the daughter of a duke will be paired ... With a dog like this!?

Eléonore, while saying this, pointed contemptuously to Saito.

“How dare you to stain the name La Vallière!”

Upon hearing this, the small body of Louise did nothing but continue shaking more and more.

But, after gathering all the courage she had left, she said:

“Eh-that is a matter that does not concern you Eléonore-oneesama, this is our problem and we will see how to fix it, I am no longer a child!”

In the time that Louise said "I'm not a child," a faint blush colored her cheeks.

At that moment, as if it is a revelation, seeing Louise blushing, Malicorne added:

“What’s with that? Being not a child eh?”

The shock made by those words, was felt by the all members of Ondine. Eléonore, equally shocked, came hurrying to his little sister.

“Louise! Do not tell me you...! How could you? Before me!?”

Louise, in response, could only look away while her cheeks blush more and more. Meanwhile, Saito was so nervous in that situation, it seemed as if he was dying.

After such statements, Eléonore suddenly realized that all the Ondine guys were looking at her. Realizing what she had said, his face flushed completely.

“... Hey! What are you looking at?”

From that moment, the tense atmosphere gradually increased until Eléonore decided to shout:

“You are all useless! Go back to work!”

After that intense exchange of words, the magical device began to move once more. Eleonore, who was busy checking the control panel, noticed at that time a large number of figures appearing in the console.

300 ... 400 ... 500 ... and so, time slowly passed while the device was digging into the ground. When they reached 600, Eléonore eyes began to blink.

“Onee-sama?”

Louise, with a face that reflected her concern, she approached his sister Eléonore. However, Eléonore's face remained serious at all times.

“Stop!”

Those young people who manipulated the remote device, hearing the order, stopped for a moment. Immediately after, Eléonore prepared to start with her

work, enchanting a simple spell.

While she diligently fixed her gaze on the delicate movement of the needles of the control panels, immediately her face revealed a sudden shock as it turned completely pale.

Everyone held their breath in anticipation, while carefully watching the movements of Eléonore.

“What is this? How is it possible to formed such immense reservoir of wind stones...? Then ... that means ... just as I imagined ...”

Louise, along with the guys from Ondine, began to look at each other in these moments.

“With these mines lying in the depths of earth ... these would be sufficient to cause the whole continent to be drag up when these began to rise,” Eléonore said, while a cold sweat ran down her back.

Having lost control of themselves and almost terrified by the sudden revelation of Eléonore, each of the guys hurriedly run to the exit.

“Hey! Idiots! Do not run! It's not as if it would happen today or tomorrow! Probably may be in a few decades ... However, given our case, we were in the worst case scenario, it would take a few years,” Eléonore said, 'Now, this is getting a little complicated ... rather, what are we supposed to do?”

Eléonore began to murmur at that time.

“Mining rocks at this depth is unlikely... and in case it could be done, transporting many wind stones would be a daunting task.”

“Ahhh~! What will we happen~?!” The boys began to shout, while they fastened their hands overhead.

Louise and Saito, observing the state of their companions nervously held hands.

* * *

While reading the report of Saito and the others, Henrietta could not help but drop her shoulders.

“... Are saying that even here in Tristain, we are suffering the same situation? Then that means the words of His Holiness the Pope... were all true.”

By the time they returned to Tristain two weeks ago, Henrietta had heard from Saito and the Ondine guys about the terrible incident in the Mountain of the Fire Dragons.

She was shocked upon hearing such stories. Back then, she was still doubtful to fully believe it.

Until three days later, at a distance in the sky, a new floating island was present, the 120 mails long island had eventually came to her sight. Now she had no choice but to believe it.

Currently, a controversy about to whom this floating island belongs was brewing both nations of Romalia and Gallia.

Escorted by Saito and Louise, one on each of her side, Eléonore have stepped forward and bowed respectfully.

“I'm afraid there is no doubt about it.”

“Is that so,” having said that, Henrietta fell into a deep silence.

What happened in the Mountain of the Fire Dragons, "the incident of the floating mountain" suddenly spread throughout Halkeginia.

The truth about the ‘slippage’ of wind stones in the subsoil of Halkeginia had been transmitted to all citizens of each nation. However, the fact that this phenomenon can occur in most of the territory of Halkeginia was carefully hidden to avoid panic that this news could cause.

Henrietta remained thoughtful for a moment, but in the end, with a resolution demonstrated by the firmness of her face, she raised her head again.

“Very well! The kingdom of Tristain, from now on, will support the crusade of the nation of Romalia!”

That decision had its obvious consequences, but it was not the time to think about them. Now is not the time to start thinking about the pros and cons of that

decision.

We are losing our place to live. This tremendous fact was enough to put aside any morals or ethics.

Afterwards, Henrietta began to prepare what would be the course of action to take from now. She quickly met the Cabinet Minister and her commanding general to open a discussion regarding how to act in the collaboration with Romalia.

Due to its particular provision of supporting the crusade, it was necessary to once again reorganize the military force to start a campaign abroad.

Romalia, Gallia and Germania, each of these three great powers were asked to send a secret message to the newly conquered and divided Albion. Furthermore, they sent a word to each of the kings of every nations, it was imperative there would soon be an assembly chaired by Pope Vittorio...

* * *

Three days later, after helping with various tasks in the Palace, Louise and Saito were exhausted, so after doing their duties they decided to return to Des Ornières.

In the calendar, it could be seen that they were already at the half month of Ansuul(August); therefore, starting next month, a new school year will begin, however the two of them were no longer in a position to enjoy a quiet and carefree school life.

Upon arriving at the mansion, the first to receive them with a smile from ear to ear, was Siesta.

“Welcome back! Saito-san! Miss Valliere!”

Grandmother Helen also came to meet them, and then offered a quick bow.

“Long time no see, welcome back my lords!”

“We prepare many delicious dishes while we are waiting!” Siesta declared.

Just as Siesta said, the dining room had a lot of dishes lined up on the table. And

aside from the food, they also saw familiar faces.

A blue-haired girl came from the kitchen, carrying the dishes to be used in the dinner. Behind her, while happily singing "Kyuukyui", a young woman with long blue hair, wearing on her head a pot whose dimensions were almost as big as her.

“Many food~~ many food~~ many food~~ This is fun!~”

While Tabitha, without saying a word, began to put the plates on the table, Siesta hurried came over her.

“Miss Tabitha! Please Stop! This is not the job for a member of the Royal Family of Gallia...”

At that, in response, Tabitha shook her head.

“I do not belong to the royal family, but I am a servant in the service of this house.”

That was it, Tabitha had dismissed her right to belong to the Royal Family, and transferred her rights of succession to Josette, along with the name Charlotte. Both the mother of Tabitha and Isabella, persuaded her to change her mind. However, Tabitha chose to come and live in this house, that was her final decision.

But still, she was given a condition for being allowed to live with Saito.

Until the end of the crusade, she had to serve as an assistant to Saito, after that, she would have to return to Gallia, but ... the fact if she would carry the crown once again, had not yet been decided. In contrast, the only mandate to do was to abolish the tradition of: *If they were twins born into the royal family, You would have to eliminate one of them.*

In order to fulfill the will of Tabitha, Isabella had to initiate an immense task changing the mindset of the nobles of Gallia, to leave behind their archaic superstitions. Therefore, the first thing they had to do was to return one by one to their legitimate houses all those young people who had lived in the convent of Saint Margaret.

Tabitha was fully determined to do everything possible to rebirth Gallia into a nation of justice, but the first thing on her agenda was to support Saito and the others on their plans.

And yet, while having a big smile on her face, the joyous Sylphid told to Siesta:

“There is nothing to worry about! Onee-san does it because she wants to. Hey Onee-san, please do it like what we practiced?”

Tabitha nodded and then threw up the dishes in her hands, launching the roast beef into the air. Sylphid cried “Uwaa!” calling the attention of the puzzled spectators.

At that moment, Tabitha pulled out and waved her wand, as a result, the roast beef floating in the air had been cut into thin slices and then, together with the plates, they landed smoothly to its position on the table.

“Incredible! You did it! Onee-san!”

Sylphid started clapping while Tabitha, as usual, remained with her expressionless face.

Saito, excited by the spectacle, began to clap too.

“That was good! It was awesome!”

Hearing his praise, Tabitha cheeks flushed a little, and not knowing that she had been carried away for that moment, the next thing she did was to take a loaf of bread in her hands.

“More! More! More! A bread? So what are you planning to do with that!?”

Tabitha tossed up the elongated loaf of bread, and then waved her wand once more, the result: the finished bread was cut vertically, producing several thin strips of bread, which ended up landing on each of the glasses placed on the table.

“Why strips?” said Louise. In response, Sylphid began pouring cream on one of the cups on the table.

“To be able to eat them well.”

Sylphid began to taste one of those strips of bread, which have previously been covered at its tip with cream.

“Oooh ~ I understand.”

All those present admired what Tabitha did. At that moment, a load voice was heard from the doorway.

“What? Did they finally return?”

“Yes! Looks like they are here.”

Kirche and Colbert have said. They, by order of the royal government, were mandated to begin the maintainance of the Ostland. They have given an official notice that the Ostland will participate in the upcoming Crusade against the elves.

“We have installed some improvements, I will give the details of them later. Also, you will have more advantage when you pilot the plane for we have already installed the barrel of the tank.” Colbert said as he patted the shoulder of Saito.

Colbert had managed to successfully install the barrel of the tiger tank into Saito’s zero fighter.

Currently, the Ostland was anchored in a nearby lake, so Des Ornières had become, at least temporarily, its home port.

Afterwards, Kirche and Colbert joined them for dinner while Siesta rushed to fill their glasses with wine.

“Well, ladies and gentlemen, let us celebrate the safe return of Saito and Miss Vallière!”

“Cheers!” Said in unison, raising their glasses up.

The cheerful conversation lasted for some time, until there was a time when Colbert, with a depressed voice, managed to ask:

“The royal government already made their decision, right?”

Saito replied, nodding his head.

“I see, then that means from now on we will be more busy.”

“So now what will your next job? Will you leave the mansion again?“, Siesta asked Saito as he showed a face that reflected his uncertainty.

“Do not tell me ... Does this have to do with the rumors about the incident of the floating mountains, which occurred in the Mountain of the Fire Dragon? It really surprised me, how is it possible that an entire mountain would rise up like that? Oh god! I should not say this, but... What the hell is happening to this world? No matter how I imagined it, it was something that should never have occurred."

Saito turned pale after hearing this. He did not want Siesta to be worried so much that’s why he never talked about the Crusade or the incident at the Gallia’s border to her. In order not to cause unnecessary panic, an order was decreed that the ‘incident’ will be kept in the utmost secrecy.

Maybe in that moment, Siesta had noticed the heavy atmosphere that began to build-up, so with a cheerful voice she tried to encourage everyone by saying:

“Well, whatever happens, even I can be calm ... because I'm sure that Saito and others will find a solution to any problem that comes their way, because until today, we have spent a lot of terrible things and problems, but still, it the end, all ends well in one way or another. And so I am convinced that this new problem will also be solved as well. Everything will be fine, that I can bet.”

Because of the words said by Siesta, it seemed that everyone present had resumed a new courage, and that was reflected in their expressions, which were seen as if thanking someone for having rescued.

“Although we expect a stormy task, this has not yet begun, so the only thing we have to do now is to have fun ... Do not you think so, Jean?”

That said, the next thing Kirche set out to do was smear the cream on Colbert’s head.

“Miss Zerbst, it seems that your favorite pastime is... putting the food on my

head!”

Despite all that was happening, Tabitha, quietly as always, simply continued her dinner.

“Do not tell me you're not afraid?” Saito asked Tabitha, to which she replied:

“No... Because you're here.”

Saito, hearing those words, felt very happy. But, seeing that Louise was at his side, decided to get a big gulp from his glass of wine, then exhaling loudly: * Howaah *

From that moment, as if immersed in deep meditation, he stared at a point in space.

Could it be... Is it because of what happened that ‘night’? When thinking about this, the chest Louise came into his mind.

At that moment, the face of a myriad of people who he had known until now, began to emerge in Saito's head. Louise and Kirche, Guiche and the others, he could even see himself with his comrades in Ondine. In his mind arose even the faces of Tabitha and Isabella.

That is, even his friends who are not present, *they are "here"*. Saito thought, being totally convinced.

At some point, there were conflicts with each of them, but in the end, they all get along.

If the elves will became aware of our situation, surely they will provide us with their help, if they properly explained...

“Well, let's eat!”

Lost in thought, Saito began to eat, and consequently empty his glass of wine each time Siesta filled it. And the obvious result was he ended totally drunk. Together with the accumulated fatigue from the various tasks of the day left Saito to be completely out of this world.

Kirche began to yawn, which was accompanied with an invitation to Colbert.

“Hey Jean, let's go to sleep.”

That said, she took him by the neck, and then after climbing up the stairs to the second floor, lost in her room.

Grandma Helen, finishing her meal, also said:

“I’ll return to my house.”

Siesta started to move up Saito taking his arm.

“Saito-san... hold on,” she said.

[*Hick!*]

“Uwa, you're already drunk! Well, I’ll take you to your room!” Saying such words was unfit for a maiden.

Then as she supported Saito on her shoulders, and took him up to his room on the second floor.

“If we count from today, it's been quite a while, so I can borrow Saito tonight, right Miss Vallière?” Siesta happily said to Louise who just came into the room.

“What's with that? Just do what you want,” said Louise with a carefree attitude as she began to brush her hair. This unexpected reaction left Siesta shocked for a second.

“Then, with your permission...”

Siesta then hugged Saito who lying on the bed.

“Kyakya! Kyakya!” Siesta shouted gaily as she moved her cheeks closer together with Saito.

Watching them for a second just to check and even without leaving the place, Louise continued brushing her hair.

This caused Siesta to be suspicious. *What's happening? How did Miss Vallière*

remain so calm?

“You have kissed Saito-san, I'm sure.”

Convinced of her own words, she was ready to put her lips together with the sleeping Saito. Still, Louise did not move an inch.

“... H-how is that you can keep your anger?”

“Huh? Is there something to be angry about?” Louise answered as if to say, "Why should I be worried by you?"

For Siesta with a sharp mind, it was easy to discover that there was something Louise was hiding.

“Something happened in Gallia, right?”

In response, Louise crossed her legs and then slowly release her hair and, with what looked like a voice from the depths of her emotions, managed to say:

“No, nothing!”

This was enough to make the blood of Siesta to go to her head. She then approached Louise, with the speed of a racing car, and asked:

“What have you done?”

Then again, with suspicious eyes, Louise said:

“Seriously, nothing happened!”

Louise looked down at Siesta, then, with a voice full of pity, she said:

“Well, you see... we have come to better understand each other, how should I say it?"

“With your bodies?”

“Please do not think of something malicious.”

“So, have you come to understand better?...” Siesta asked.

At that time, Louise bit her lip slightly, then look away which until now was remained on Siesta.

“Have you done it? Even a little?”

This became a conversation between women, so Siesta did not have to measure her words.

“That’s nonsense! We have not done it yet! We were just...”

Louise began to mutter embarrassed.

“You were just about to do something.”

“Y-y-yes... something like that.”

At that very moment, an evil smile appeared in Siesta’s face.

“What is it?”

“How beautiful you are, Miss Vallière! Thinking that you won just for that, as expected from little lady, a beautiful and innocent young lady.”

“Shut up! Mind your own business... if I'm an innocent young lady, then you are a maid in lust, waiting for your mating season! Seriously, why is it that I have to pay attention to a pervert cat like you?”

“If you have complaints, tell that to Her Majesty the Queen. And besides, if I'm a cat; considering how you've been behaving so far, then you should be one little mouse.”

“How dare you, seeing a noble like me as a mouse...”

“Chu-chu!” [Sound that a mouse makes in Japanese.]

“Nyan-nyan!” [Sound of a cat.]

Both girls imitated the sounds, which according to them, was suitable to the other. Then, they stared at each other.

“Oh come on, it’s not chu-chu it should be, chu-chu-chu!”

“What did you say? I do not understand your meowing, nyan-nyan!”

Already agitated and being directly opposite to one another, they began to push each other with their foreheads.

“What! Anyway you said it’s my turn today.”

After making a quick bow to Louise, Siesta prepared to enter into the sheets, right next to Saito.

“You stay there very still,” said Louise who was determined to leave them alone, only for today, then continue...

“1!" There was an enthusiastic voice resonating on the room.

“Huh?”

“2!”

Watching her carefully, Siesta was taking off her clothes and then threw them to the ground, each of the pieces of underwear she wore.

“Wait!? What are you doing!?”

“You don’t know? Well, this is my way of gaining the upper hand!”

“What upper hand!? Remember your place as a maid and dress up at once!”

Agitated, Louise then lunged herself to Siesta, rubbing her face, and tried to separate Siesta from Saito’s side.

But upon seeing them, Louise would not have to undress too as she struggled with Siesta, right? Well ... because at that time:

[BAAM] They heard the door opened and Sylphid was immediately seen pushing Tabitha inside, she did this while holding timidly a pillow in her arms.

“Siiip ~! Oneesama also want to participate in the battlefield!”

“.....”

Then, while Louise and Siesta looked puzzled at the standing Tabitha; Sylphid took her by the arms, lifted her and placed her right next to Saito.

“What are you doing! Stupid Dragon!“ Called Louise.

“I'm not a stupid dragon, I'm a rhyme dragon!”

“Call yourself whatever you want! But what about the room we prepared for you?”

“It's that... onee-sama said she could not sleep...”

“Did she say that?”

“No she didn’t, but from what I saw from her attitude, she was very restless from time to time as she glanced in the direction of this room...”

As she said that, Tabitha, with the use of her wand, stopped her with a strike in the head.

“It hurts! It hurts! I was only doing my duty as a familiar! It hurts!”

“Enough with that, let’s go back to our room.”

“Please wait!”

Louise and Siesta said while watching Tabitha.

“.....”

So Tabitha did not move, she was just there right next Saito.

“But, Tabitha, perhaps you cannot be...” Siesta mentioned.

After hearing this, Tabitha's cheeks flushed slightly.

“You cannot be serious, right?” Siesta said in a surprised voice.

At that moment, perhaps by shame, Tabitha decided to cover her face with the sheets.

Louise's eyes could not look away from that scene.

“With Siesta it’s fine, but I cannot let a guest who was left in our care to do that whenever she wanted.”

“What’s the problem if I do that?”

Then Louise tried to get inside the covers, but Tabitha held it firmly making it impossible to open.

“Uwa oneesama! Your're cute when you're honest with yourself. I am extremely happy about it,” Sylphid began to spin around the room while she screamed Kyu!kyu!kyu. “But anyway, you need to be calm, flat pink-haired girl!”

“Tell me, who is the flat pink-haired girl?... stupid Dragon! If you don’t leave now, you will have to pay the consequences,” Louise claimed Sylphid.

“See? Onee-sama is different from you, she is still an innocent girl, she is still in the age where she was happy to just sleep beside him... very different from you in your mating season.”

“I'm starting to like this dragon,” added Siesta.

“Hey! You better keep quiet, I don't that opinion.”

“Onee-sama is a poor girl who was always been alone, surrounded only by sadness, and now she has finally found a safe place where they can live peacefully, she will be more than satisfied if you only allowed to sleep on his side. That's truly the kindness of a mature woman."

“Hmm...” Louise groaned.

Certainly she could at least allow Tabitha slept beside him, for the bonds that she shared with Saito because of that ‘night’ were already something.

I would not be mature if I get angry over something like this. Louise thought this and ended up allowing the two of them to sleep with Saito.

“Well, what am I going to do?”

When she saw that the right side of the bed was already been taken, Louise decided to go for the left, to which, at the time she was about to crawl into the sheets, Siesta, who was quite determined, shook her head in denial.

“Today, this is my side,” she said.

[Grrr] Louise roared at that moment, then thinking well as she shook her head trying to convince herself. *Well then I will endure, however ... this is just for today.*

In the depth of night, Saito woke up shaking his head. He had drunk enough, so it was no wonder he had a severe headache.

Ah ... it seems that they took me to the bed after I finishing drinking, he said to himself.

At that time, from one side of the bed, he heard beside him a sleeping sound that surely came from the a girl. On his left side, resting her cheek against his arm, the one who slept beside him looked like Siesta. Seeing her, a sudden tenderness rose from within him, causing him to gently caress her head.

So ... the little breath I hear from my right has to be Louise, right? Saito had decided to stretch his hand and took the much smaller counterpart who slept beside him.

Aaa ~, as I thought, this is Louise ... At that very second, a larger tenderness began to flood in his heart. Remembering the other day ... remembering that body within that night, Saito's heart once again, began to pound wildly.

Just a little ... I want to touch them. It will be alright if it’s just a little. Since then, we have not had a real moment to be alone, because there were always excuses. Saito said to self justified his actions. He was then decided to touch

Louise.

Saito had stretched his arm shakily, reaching to feel the sensation of the négligée that Louise was wearing. So ... totally decided... he stretched his hand to her chest.

Flat ... but, the last time I saw seemed to be a little bigger, but as I got to touch them ... who knows. Saito reconsidered at that time, then lose completely to his desire to "touch directly". In doing so, his hand moved inside the opening of that negligee.

In response, a sudden reaction came from the small body of Louise as she began to shake.

And then he quietly said:

“... Are you awake?” he asked. He then apparently perceived a nodding head.

Hell, I want to kiss her. Saito sincerely told himself.

"... I want to kiss you, can I?"

A few moments passed before there was an answer, then ... with a hesitation evident in her body, she nodded.

Upon getting a reply, Saito gently reached out what looked like a chin.

Determined more than ever, Saito moved closer to that little face, so he can kiss her lips lovingly.

Louise's attitude, at the time, reflected the enormous nervousness she felt. The atmosphere had become tense, however, he could still convey his feelings with his lips.

Saito, more determined, decided to embrace her by stretching his arms up to her hips, she felt it with her right hand. In response, she removed that hand away, and moved closer to his body.

He was ecstatic and lost in a dream, then without thinking, he prepared to raise that négligée ... starting from her hips.

Louise's small body began to shivered, then she reached out, trying to put up a resistance.

“... Do you feel sorry?”

She nodded in response.

“... Well, I have already seen them once.”

After a moment, the opposing force from the arm of Louise finally calm down. That’s when Saito was finally able to lift slowly that negligee, which caused Louise tiny body to shake uncontrollably.

After contemplating his shyness, a new feeling of tenderness came to Saito and urged him to kiss her again. This time, the stiffness in the body of Louise was much lower. Saito placed his lips into Louise's small lips, so ... timid ... that little lips began to kiss Saito.

Already decided as there is nothing that can stop him, at this time, Hiraga Saito will touch directly her chest.

In the instant his right hand touched the chest of Louise, the uncontrollable trembling of her body made a word escaped from her lips.

“A...”

“?”

From inside Saito's head, there was a question mark, *Is that the voice? ... Not Louise .... Then whose?*

Without thinking, he turned his hand to her head ... *her hair is short.*

“Ta-Tabitha?”

Without thinking, Saito pitched a scream.

“Wh-what the hell is happening?”

“What’s that sound?”

These were the voices of Louise and Siesta coming from his left side.

“Wah! No, it's nothing!”

“ ... Obviously something has happened!” While muttering this, Louise started to take a magic lamp.

“.....”

Upon finding the lamp, she immediately went to Tabitha and saw that her ngligee was raised.

While trembling in fear, Saito, who was beside her, despite trying to hide his hands, they were kept clinging to Tabitha holding her hips.

In an instant, the sleepy eyes of Louise were transformed into demonic eyes.

“...You! W-w-what are you doing?”

“N-n-no that’s not what it seems! It thought it was you!” Screaming this without thinking, the face of Tabitha formed an expression as if to say, huh?

For a moment she retained that hard expression, but then her eyes sprouted... tears whose quantity was enough and began to fall.

"......."

Then Saito, cannot stand to look at the crying Tabitha, shook his head.

“Huh? No! I did not mean that! You also are the best!”

This caused the entire body of Louise to shake.

“I s-s-said I would not run away no matter what happened, I a-a-also said I was resigned to whatever might occurrrrr bu-bu-but doing that~ ....”

“Y-y-you-you are wrong!“ Saito tried to dissuade.

“With-with-with the little girl that was left in our care, are you out of you mind!?”

“Nooo~ Miss Vallière, if you look carefully, you'll realize that they seem to have fallen for each other!” Siesta shared her impressions as she opened both her arms.

Saito began crawling, trying to get away from that place, but Louise caught him.

“But all I did was to confuse one person from another..."

“It’s a pity ... that was a very unfortunate accident, I understand, but ...as imagined ... this is something I cannot forgive.”

And so the desperate cry of Saito echoed throughout the mansion.

Chapter 8 - Elf of the Sahara

The scorching rays of the sun were burning the vast land of the Sahara. As far as the eye can reached, it seemed like a small lake was in the middle of the sea of sand, like a solitary island in the ocean.

Its diameter was approximately about 100 mails, and next to the small woods surrounding this lake, there was a small cabin, because of its exquisitely finished walls, with a completely smooth texture, the structure was almost a perfect cube.

This was a building that was never seen anywhere in Halkeginia. Directly in front of the cottage and extending therefrom, there was a long dock, which continued to extend until the middle of the lake itself.

At the end of the dock, a girl was splashing in the water of that lake.

Her body was not covered by any type of clothing, leaving a view of a young body, with slender limbs and a long blonde hair that was almost transparent, that girl gives off a vigorous charm, an aura similar to that of a fairy. Surely, if the inhabitants of Halkeginia will see her, she would be confused as an incarnation of a beautiful fairy.

While floating on the surface of the water, the girl whose eyes remained closed as if asleep, was covered only with the vastness of the sky.

Thinking that the harsh rays of the sun would burn that delicate body, the white skin of this young woman did not show the slightest sign of burn or even a stain.

And the secret behind this mysterious phenomenon was floating in the air.

Wind and water stones ... sometimes called: tears of the water spirits.

Due to a magical device activated by the "former resident", the air that enveloped this oasis could block the sun's rays and preserve the pleasant

humidity levels and temperature inside.

This was the level of technology specializing in "magical techniques of the former resident", dominated by elves.

The ears of the girl floating in the water, were long and ends with a fine tip. Her nose was comparable to that of a human, only finer than them. She was an elf.

Suddenly, the girl's eyes opened wide, her pale blue eyes at that time were set at one point in the sky, as if monopolizing her view, a small dot appeared in a distance, which quickly grew larger.

That point was a wind dragon. Compared Halkeginia’s dragons this was a little bit large. Within the field of view of the girl, this wind dragon approaching her gradually became bigger and bigger.

Then, shaking its mighty wings, the dragon landed on the dock.

Water splashed violently, as the body of the young elf was playing with the newly created waves. After enjoying gaily in the water, the girl buried her face once more underwater; *Fuhn* and exhale.

“Hey! Ali! What are you doing here?” said by the young elf.

Mounted on the back of the wind dragon, was a young elf with a youthful aura.

“I should be the one to ask that! What are you thinking by sleeping in a place like this?”

The man called Ali, upon seeing her condition, his face immediately turned red.

“Oy! Luctiana! What are you thinking, get dressed already! If Munila-sama got to hear about this, you'd be in big trouble!”

“Ali, it’s okay because I'm at home anyway, also I do not see any reason why my mother have to put any complaints.”

“But what if someone suddenly came to visit you, what would you do?”

“Here? But I don’t see anyone around here.” Luctiana said with a pensive face....

After hearing this, he looked at her and again Ali's face turned all red.

“We are not married yet! And so now, please do not put any whim in my mind!”

“Ali, do not tell me, dear, that you have no interest in seeing my skin?”

“E, that's... That’s not what I’m talking about! Stop thinking like that! Perhaps we just let that topic off until were married, okay!? What I’m talking about is that we are the chosen race, the nobles who have been assigned to protect the balance in the world ...And you should be aware of it at all times!"

In response Luctiana extended both her hands thinking, *I'm going to show you.*

“By god! Why do you let my fiance to repeat the same baseless reasons the council and our grandparents always say?!”

Upon hearing this, Ali began gradually raising his voice.

“What's with the attitude? Are you somewhat influenced by these barbarians?”

Almost incredulous at this, Luctiana hit upon to respond, watching her hand located right beside her smiling face:

“This? This was done when one is "surprised". A barbarian, a traveling merchant showed me the other day, he taught me this and a lot of other funny gestures, for example...

“I was right! Get dressed quickly and get ready for we are leaving!” Alii screamed. In response Luctiana, lifted her lips with a face as if to say "you're boring".

With that attitude she started to climb on the dock.

“Therefore, I tell you, we will not get along well!

With a carefree face, ignoring Luctiana, Ali started walking along the dock. He was practically stunned in place as he saw her walked majestically on that dock; it was the majestic look and confidence of a fairy in charge of the protection of the desert.

From the tips of her beautiful wet blonde hair large raindrops fell, she left the dock painted with the footsteps of a fairy.

Inside the cabin of white walls, endless objects were cluttering the place. There was a bed and a desk. In the background, a door could be seen leading to the room where they practiced the culinary arts.

The room was filled with few artifacts of "elves", which were very well sorted and distributed.

However the most noticeable things in that cabin came from those "barbarians", that sort of things were flooding into the house leaving almost no space.

Those things that stood out were tableware, such as vases and plates, if an elf saw them, they would think those things were hopelessly tacky ornaments. Aside from that, necklaces and tiaras, richly adorned with jewels, were kept hanging on the wall as a decoration.

In a corner of the house, next to a wall was a bookcase in which, as if crammed, were filled with a few history books and encyclopedias illustrated by elves. This contrasted greatly with the huge number of books from the "human world" cramming all the remaining space of that bookcase.

The most abundant of these books were mainly popular novels and plays, the bookcase also accommodated the recent and popular works such as "The Hero of Ivaldi" and "Madam butterfly". On the floor, instead of an elf carpet style, it was replaced by a lace curtain from Gallia, which was spread on the ground.

By looking carefully, not only was the curtain being used in an improper way, but along with it a huge number of objects were being used incorrectly. Why would a lot of brooms were hanging from the ceiling, or why was an umbrella that was open and turned upside down serve as a trash can?

Along wall of the house, a foil was nailed to the floor, a blade was stuck in a sliced fruit which had been left there to dry. Luctiana ate one of those slices, took a cloth and began to dry her body.

It was until she placed her underwear, that Ali dared to enter the room, he was frowning.

“ ... god, whenever I come here this seems like a room of a barbarian.”

“Cute isn’t it, I like these things more than elves, finally my house is almost full.”

When Luctiana finished dressing, she was covered with a blanket which was adorned with a lot of feathers in the neck area.

“Well? What do the council want with me?”

“Lord Bidashal, has finally returned from the world of the barbarians.”

“My uncle is back!?”

With eyes wide open with excitement, Luctiana started running towards the wind dragon that was floating and drinking water in the lake, after jumping she mounted on it.

“Oi! Wait for me! Do not leave me here!”

Distraught, Ali was chasing behind her.

After flying for about 30 minutes while mounted on the dragon's back, they saw in a distance the bluish emerald sea, beside it, projecting towards the coast, almost completely robbing their view, a giant artificial city.

With a shape of concentric circles repeating over and over again, extending one after the other, with a diameter of several riigs, they had finally come to this artificial island...

It was the elve’s capital Nephthys, it was Adiir.

The objective of the pair was the epicenter of the circles, in which the wind dragon was headed.

In the center, a giant ... one truly indescribable white-painted building was there. With a height of around 200 meiru rather than a tower , this could be described more as we would say in the world of Saito, like a skyscraper.

Of course a similar structure with so many floor, did not exist in Halkeginia.

Then the wind dragon landed on the roof of that building, there they saw several wind dragons stationed on that building, those dragons grouped and were alerted immediately as they saw the visitors.

This building was also the headquarters Nephthys Council ... which was better known as "Kasbah". This could be said, was the pillar supporting every elves.

To the elves whose territory was a vague concept itself, they came to be better organized into clans, which were distributed throughout the territory of the vast desert.

Those clans, each of which had its own representative, who was sent right here to the capital city , also within the council itself, once every few years , they chose internally who among them would be the "leader" of the council.

Upon descending from dragon, Ali and Luctiana prepared to go down to one of the lower floors , to do this the first step was to mount to an ‘elevator’ like device.

“Which floor?”

“Floor 42.”

The ‘elevator’ like device began to move and then transported them to their desired floor...

This was the floor for the members of the Council, every one of them has a room in this floor, dutifully placed for their official duties.

Just outside the door of one of those rooms, Ali called inside.

“Lord Bidashal, I brought Luctiana as you requested.”

Immediately after the door opened Lord Bidashal showed his face.

“Long time no see Luctiana.”

“Uncle!”

With a wide smile, Luctiana then lunged at her uncle's arms hugging him.

“Hey, hey how was the world of the barbarians? Let me hear it! Do you see anything strange? Did you touch it? Did you bring it?”

“How are you, Lord Bidashal?” Ali asked with a worried face. For what he had heard, his fiancee 's uncle, had suffered a terrible experience in the human world, or at least that was the rumors.

“I’m fine, I just gave my report to the Chief Tariq.” A bitter smile flowed from the face of Bidashal as he said this.

And then he began to tell them what happened.

After he finished his story, the two looked at each other’s face , and from that moment they began to shake their head as if to say " I cannot believe it."

“Is it true that this barbarian king who fabricated a "stone of fire" burned all those thousands of people?"

“It’s true.”

“And why did he did that?”

“I don’t know , maybe I should have asked him.”

Then Bidashal sighed.

“I also heard that this man was murdered by his own family, but that's strange, as I've heard, the families of the barbarians mages swear allegiance to their masters , then why?”

“That's what I wanted to know.”

“Yaa ... Uncle , how is that you never know anything, then what are you really after by going to the country of the barbarians?”

“That's why I say, my job was to negotiate with the barbarians , as I told you before right?”

“And that's how you ended up as a servant of the barbarian king right? Pathetic!”

“Luctiana!” Said Alii, trying to reprimand, to which Bidashal replied with a

bitter smile.

“So yeah, something like that, but in my defense, the man possessed a great "charisma" that it was impossible to resist, it would be more correct to say that he was one of the bearers of the "power of the demon."

“But then if the king with which you've entered into negotiation had died, then that means ...”

“Exactly, in conclusion, the negotiations have failed.”

Ali paled at the words of Bidashal.

“Then , a new barbarian with the "powers of the demon " will be born, and eventually will come to Sahara to try to open the "door of Shaitaan " I ask ...

“That is the problem...”

Luctiana tilted her head as she watched the two with shocked face.

“And why is it a problem? Simply guard the door and try to negotiate with them again, right?”

“Since there is no other subject with which to negotiate, and that is why, today I will send you for...”

Upon hearing this, Ali's face became completely blue.

“I refuse! I absolutely refuse!”

“But I haven’t said anything.”

“I know what you will say! Lord Bidashal and his Excellency the leader, it’s always easy to know what you two were thinking and I'm so sure what you will say!”

“In that case this talk will be quick.” Bidashal said.

The only one who could not predict the development of the conversation was Luctiana, then looking directly at both of them she said:

“What the hell are you are talking about? Explain it me so that I too can understand what is happening.”

“For your honorable uncle wants me to lead a platoon of soldiers to land in the country of the barbarians.”

“As I imagined , at that age you just have given the title of "Faaris" (soldier) right?” Bidashal said as a smile spread across his face.

“Huh? Really? But it's wonderful!” Scream Luctiana completely excited.

“How was that wonderful!? Besides they also wanted to capture one of these demons, how were you able to see the wonder from this?”

“Exactly , this job is perfect for a brave young man like you .”

“Then why is it necessary to capture one of the demons?”

“At this time... we are in the era where the demons reappear , but, if the four of four will not meet , they will not be capable of deploying all its powers, plus it would be useless to kill any of them, we just have to hide one of the demon.”

“And this is why we have to capture them?”

“That is, making use of this tactic, we can probably match our conditions in the field of battle.”

“Amazing! This will be a great adventure!”

Lost in a trance, Luctiana slapped with both hands, in reaction , Ali once again frowned.

“Luctiana! You’re doing again one of those barbarian’s gestures...”

“Hey Ali! This really is fantastic! That great opportunity to visit a person the barbarian world , yes yes, this is a unique opportunity!”

“Oi! Oi! You 're really naive! Lord Bidashal! I will never go to the world of those barbarians! And that order to capture one of the demons, I absolutely refuse!”

“Oi, Don’t call me like that!”

Then without a second , Luctiana said:

“Take me too! Ali! yes, please?”

“You?! What are you saying?! This is not a job a scholar like you should participate!”

“What's wrong? What happens to your oath for not disobeying the orders of uncle?”

Then Luctiana observed heavily Alii 's face for a moment.

“I refuse ! I invoke my right to reject conclusively to that order! No matter how many lives you have, it will never be enough if you would accept such a task!”

“So...”

Luctiana crossed her arms as she turned away from the sight of Ali.

“Okay, so I decided to cancel my plan to marry you, I cannot allow my boyfriend to snatch from me the greatest adventure I ever could ever had , I also invoke my right to refuse you!”

“What did you say?!”

With an astonished face Ali looked incredulously at Luctiana, then from that moment he approached the window, casually fixed his eyes looking outside, and then turned his gaze to his fiancee's uncle.

“...Lord Bidashal, you planned all this huh?”

“What are you talking about? This step was a decision made only by you and Luctiana who were already an adult, I have nothing to do with the problems you two have.”

Chapter 9: Chance Meeting

It has been three days since Saito and the others had returned to Des Ornieres. Until then, no important news had been sent from the Royal Palace so Saito and the others just spend their days peacefully. In fact, it was so peaceful that they received a letter from Tiffania who were spending her days with children from their orphanage in Tristain asking, "How is everything?", a relaxing time in sharp contrast from the days before.

Since the first night of the day they returned home, Saito's room became a battlefield during bedtime. Until now, he was already used to sleep where he was always sandwiched between Louise and Siesta, and because of this, you could perceive to some extent, the delicate balance that existed between the three. But now, there was Tabitha to account for.

Whenever night fell, Sylphid would always push Tabitha, who would also bring her pillow, to Saito's room. Anyway, if there were still two persons, each could be accommodated in each side, but as it has increased to three persons, one must be left out of the bed.

Louise claimed the right side for herself as if it was the most natural thing, claiming that, for Saito, she was considered his number one for eternity, and nothing would change that. Since the third daughter of a duke has declared that, there was nothing more to discuss about it.

Siesta also naturally claimed the left side. Since she was the one attending to saito all along. She even said, a serious expression, "If I were to sleep in another room there would be monsters".

After that, Sylphid, representing Tabitha, raised an objection and said, "This girl has always grown up in very sad and lonely environment, you know, so you two should show some consideration for her, you know. And, unlike the both of you, who would flaunt your pheromones whenever Saito is around, she would be content to be able to just stay by his side, you know. That's the kind of good girl

who is nearly extinct nowadays for you, you know! Even among rhyme dragons she would be extremely popular, you know!"

While this happened, Saito could only sit outside the mosquito tent quietly, hugging his knees as he watched the chaos of four girls arguing attentively.

"Are you in bliss?" If Saito was asked this, he could only answer, "I think so." It was such a tense and delicate situation. The situation that required him to choose a girl from them, makes me really feel as if his charm has suddenly soared. By the way, in the past, I could not even handle any girl in front of me. During that time, I has been so desperate for chocolates from girls, even the cloddish ones...Reminiscing about this faraway life of his, made him suddenly understood that, life, is really full of surprises.

Finally, Sylphid who had offered to be the peacemaker made her conclusion.

"I know! Then, onee-sama should be on the top!"

"Top?"

Sylphid nodded.

"Yes. As you were on the both sides, there is no other place but the top."

"This doesn't seem really good, does it?"

Saito said, and Tabitha who had been remaining silent up till now, said with an expressionless face,

"Does it?"

Cold sweat began to ran down Saito's back. If he just answered honestly, "It doesn't," then he would hurt her feelings but if he said, "it's good, I guess, " then Louise...

He had no choice. Saito could only nod.

"Okay, top, is okay then..."

"Hey, what's 'okay' supposed to mean. But thank you very much anyway. For a

simpleton like you to have the honor of sharing the bed with onee-sama, you should be glad, you know."

Slyphid said that while grumbling to Saito like an old maid.

So, after that was settled, it was finally time for bed.

Suddenly, they heard someone bang at the door impatiently.

"...Who could it be at this hour of the night?"

"Is it someone from the neighborhood?"

Siesta's face became worried the moment Saito said that.

"Could it be...would it be, someone after Saito's life..."

Saito's eyes met with Louise's.

That's right.

The killers, known as the "Elemental Siblings"...not only have they destroyed Derflinger in Des Ornieres, they also attempted to assassinate Saito in Gallia, the mysterious brothers.

One of them, Jack, who had been captured in Gallia, remained stubbornly silent, even under the threat of torture his mouth are sealed.

Saito's eyes grew fierce as he quickly grabbed the katana on the right side of his bed. The rune on his left hand began to shine immediately.

"I shall take my revenge for what they did to Derf!"

Louise's expression turned serious as she also prepared her wand.

"Just watch me finish them off quickly."

Tabitha, without a word, gripped her staff tightly in her hands.

"However, aren't they just underestimating us a little.....now Kirche and Colber-sensei are also present in this house too. They won't defeat us that easily."

Upon leaving the room, they found Kirche and Colbert, who had also prepared their wands, standing there.

Saito and others descended downstairs carefully, standing guard on the left and right side of the door.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

The door was knocked again.

Saito stretched his hand and removed the bolt.

"Ready?"

Having said that, the door was opened wide, and someone rushed through the opening.

"Attack!"

Magic flew from both sides of the door. The "Air Net" and "Icicle Arrows"...Kirche, in turn, called forth a huge fireball that emerged from the tip of her wand. Louise, preparing the second wave of attacks, chanted the "Explosion" spell.

Saito quickly leaped forward to pin the enemy down, his katana placed on the enemy's throat.

"Admit your defeat!"

"...The lot of you, what are you trying to do to me?"

A shrill voice rang out, obviously upset. Under the light emitted from Kirche's fireball, everyone could finally see the face of the mysterious character lying on the floor.

"Eleonore-neesama!"

Louise cried out, her face pale.

"Sorry, I'm so sorry!"

Saito and Louise stood in front of Eleonore, bowing their heads dejectedly. Eleonore sat cross-legged in front of them. She really had the aura of a queen when she was angry.

After knowing that the intruder was Eleonore, Kirche and Colbert returned to the room, saying that there was none of their business anymore.

"Seriously! Mistaking me for a killer! Ridiculous!"

Facing Eleonore's fury, Louise and Saito just kept bowing.

"Sorry, sorry, sorry."

Against Louise and Saito who had been apologizing profusely, Eleonore watched the two of them for a while before suddenly saying, "I'm hungry".

Siesta immediately ran to the kitchen to prepare a meal frantically.

Watching Eleonore stuff herself with the food hungrily, Louise asked, timidly.

"So, onee-sama, are you here for something important?"

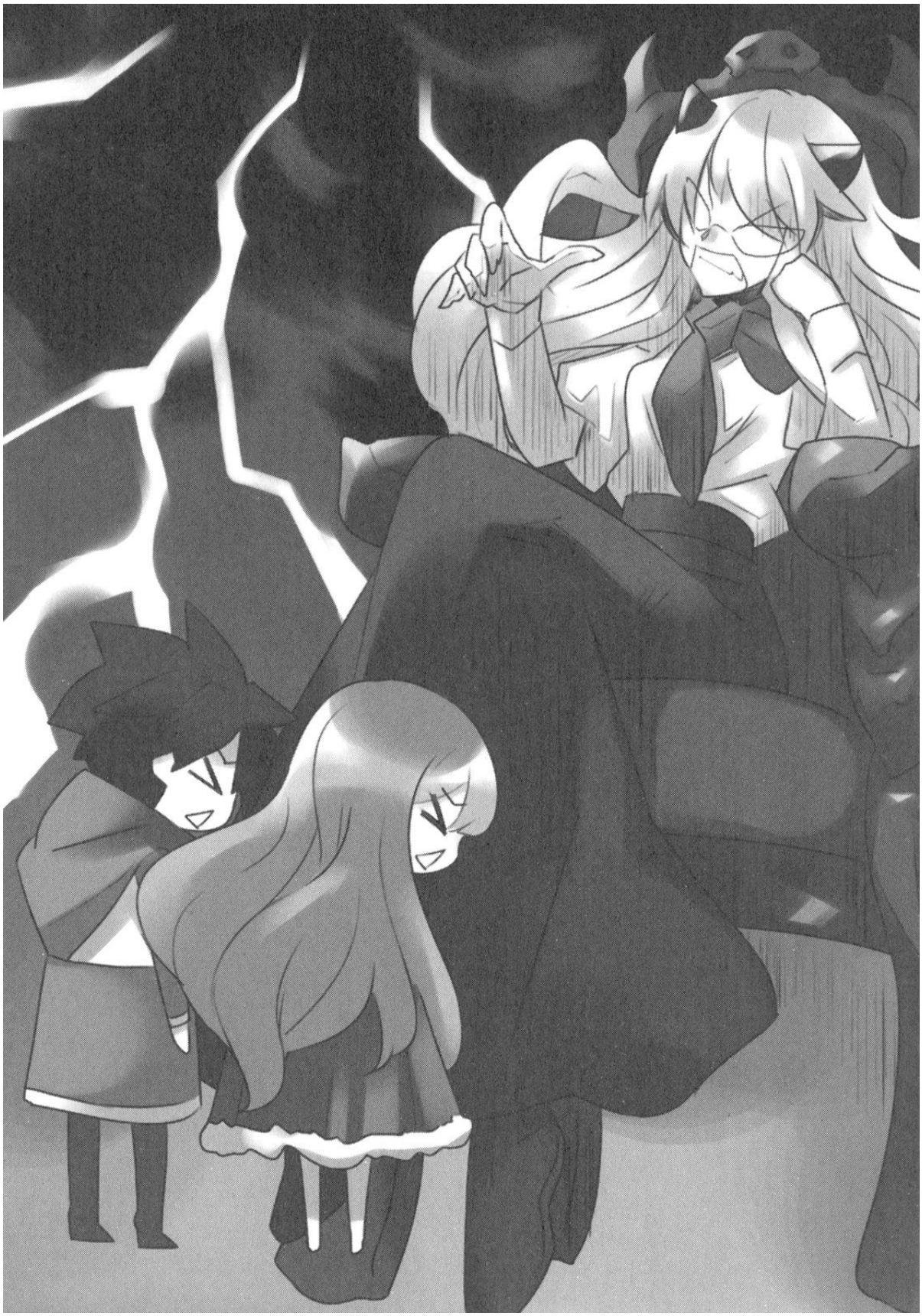
Eleonore's face turned slightly red.

"Well, it's not really a big deal. Just wanted to bother you a bit."

"Eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeh!"

Louise's eyes grew wide in surprise.

"Um? Why? Onee-sama?"



"As I've said before, I have no reason to be called an 'Onee-sama' by you."

After Eleonore shot Saito a fierce glare,

"Meh, however, I do think that living in the suburbs once in a while is not a bad idea."

"What about work in the Institute?"

"I will go to work from here."

"Eh? How are you going to do that?"

"I will have you know that I brought my own dragon cage. So for the time being, I will be in your care."

Sensing something between the lines from her attitude, Saito asked tentatively,

"Is, is it that...Onee, I mean, Miss Eleonore was scared that....."

Once Saito asked like that, Eleonore shivered and her shoulders began shaking.

Louise also nodded.

"Ah. That's right. The only people who knew about it, was us....."

As the wind stones in Halkegenia began to go ballistic, half of the land may become unlivable, and this piece of knowledge is indeed frightening. After all, the ground beneath their feet now may just rise to the heavens the very next day.

Saito thought before when he used to watch a show called "A Big Earthquake Is About To Hit Tokyo!" on television. Watching such a show does make some people imagine things. Nevertheless, this is not a show on television but something that would really happen.

"There's, there's nothing to be worried about."

Eleonore said, shaking her head. However, her face has turned pale. Her acting not frank and all seem to have stirred up Saito's masochistic heart.

"You're lying. You're very afraid, aren't you."

"I've already told you, I'm not afraid."

"Miss Eleonore is also pretty cute, isn't she?"

After Saito said this brightly, Eleonore lifted her brow.

"Hey you, do you take me as a fool?

"I've always felt that onee-sama is actually a timid person."

Louise added.

"Enough is enough! Go to bed now! Children should have gone to bed by now! Also, I have something to say to you two tomorrow!"

Eleonore yelling made Louise and Saito escape to the second floor in panic.

So, they went into bed and made themselves comfortable. Louise lying on Saito's right side, Siesta on the left, and then Tabitha was put on Saito's body by Slyphid.

After that, Slyphid huddled beside the bed and began snoring, "goo~goo~". Is this really okay, thought Tabitha as she gazed at Saito's face.

"Hmm? What's up?"

"This isn't good, is it?"

Apparently Tabitha still minded the current arrangement. Saito looked at his right, and noticed Louise shooting fierce glares at his direction. And during this tense atmosphere, Eleonore entered Saito's room.

"Louise. Where is my room ... This! This is! You guys! This is!!"

Eleonore screamed upon seeing the four of them sleep on the same bed.

"You, you guys! .....Actually!! .....Men and women before marriage...actually!! .....And!! ....."

Eleonore collapsed to the ground, frothing in her mouth.

Louise and Saito was once again brought to the living room on the first floor. This was, of course, in order for them to receive a sermon from Eleonore.

"Surprise, surprise, you are all actually sleeping together."

Eleonore was now engulfed in her boundless rage.

"There will be no room for negotiation. The schedule has changed. Louise, come back with me to De Valliere tomorrow."

"......Eh?"

Louise's face went pale.

"What are you eh-ing for? Did you really think that the Founder Brimir would forgive the act of man and women sleeping together before marriage? It seems that, you really need mother and father to teach you everything again from scratch."

But Louise suppressed her fears desperately, and said.

"I, I refuse."

"What did you say?"

"After all, I also have unfinished business here."

"That's true ..... After all, you are taking on the role of 'the pillar of the country'."

Eleonore then sighed deeply.

"And that's why I have to remind you that, the both of you are just acquainted because of the 'legendary force'. You've not understood this particular situation and so that's how this misunderstanding came to be. However, from now on, you have to rely on this man to complete your task. However, you still have to consider your familiar and life partner as two different things."

Eleonore said this with a grim expression.

Since they have already came to this point, if he did not say anything now, he would not be a man. Saito set his foot down and spoke.

"Onee-sama."

"Didn't I say that I didn't want to be called 'onee-sama' by you, right....."

"No. Please be sure to let me call you that, onee-sama. Indeed, from onee-sama's point of view, I may be someone with an unknown background. However, this feeling I have, my desire to protect Louise, will never lose to anyone."

"Just now, weren't you sleeping with multiple women?"

"Guh", Saito had nothing to say for this. There was a reason for this. However, although there is reason, he can't say it, and even if he told her that nothing happened even though they were sleeping together, he didn't think he would get any trust from her. No, well actually something did happen. However, it was all a misunderstanding and it can't be prevented ..... While Saito was silently thinking about all this,

"Isn't your erratic behavior, the reason why Louise ran away from home?" (Translator note: here she was referring to Saito changing his mind on girls)

Saito hung his head dismally. She hit the mark, so Saito could not say anything else.

"Hey, Louise. Now do you understand? This guy is completely hopeless. You must have been manipulated by some force for you to actually think that this guy is a good man."

Louise was silent for a moment like she was reorganizing what she was going to say. However, she still shook her head.

"I'm not going back."

"Louise!"

"Onee-sama. I've already made up my mind. No matter what happens, I will always stay by Saito's side. So far I've been in many situations that I don't like. How many times it has happened, feeling betrayed, getting bullied, I don't really know. And if I really wanted to talk about it, his interests are very strange. That brain of his is useless, like it had been cooked. But, but really."

Louise grasped Saito's hand.

"For me, except him, I don't want anybody else. There was once I tried to forget everything and run away. However, forgetting about him, that was impossible. I think about him everyday. What was he doing now, things like that, I think about it every time."

"...Seriously. They say that love is blind or something, and it really is true! However, a promise is a promise. That guy over there! I did make you promise me something, right? You must have manners fitting of an aristocrat. Well then, let's take a look of what you have now."

Now that she have mentioned it, he did made such a deal with her. However, as he was busy recently, he did not have any chance to practice.

No, in fact, even if he did practice, it was useless anyway ..... [HERE=] Even so, Saito tried his best to do an aristocratic bow. To feel the aristocratic soul flow through his veins.....

"....."

Eleonore was silent. Saito couldn't help but shudder a little. Did this mean that their efforts were recognized? Is it okay now?

However, reality may not be as naive as you think.

"A total failure! You know, if you really wanted to marry the daughter of a Duke ... ... "

This time, Louise interrupted Eleonore.

"If you still can't permit this, I'll dismiss the Duke family's name from mine."

"What?"

Eleonore's eyes went round.

"It doesn't matter if I'm not a noble. I don't even need the noble title. Because, that is not a choice I made myself. I appreciate my family, and also love my family. However, Saito is the only one person I chose for myself."

Eleonore stared at her youngest sister, dumbfounded.

"Are you saying that, you're going to throw away the name of De Valliere?"

Eleonora buried herself into the sofa, and gave a long sigh.

"Onee-sama?"

"En. Give me a minute. I need to recollect my thoughts."

Eleonore frowned, and started to massage her forehead with her thumb. She then looked up at Louise with a serious expression.

"Are you serious about this?"

Louise nodded gravely.

"Ah~"

"Onee-sama?"

"I really envy you, you know. Although I co~mpletely don't understand what was it that you find charming in this man, but since you say he's a good man, then surely he has something that is commendable."

Although this was not something nice to hear, but Saito's entire body loosened up.

"Louise."

"Here."

"Remember to give a proper report to Father and Mother."

Louise's eyes went wide in surprise.

"Onee-sama?"

"You and I are very similar. Stubborn and willful, we don't go against anything we have said. Anyway, even if we feel regret later, such is life."

"Thank you! Onee-sama!"

Louise gave Eleonore a tight hug.

"Seriously... ... Oh right, there's something else I need you to promise me with. Starting today the both of you will not be sleeping in the same bed. Understand me? Before your marriage, there will definitely not be any sharing of the bed."

Louise and Saito nodded.

"However, the reason before was because there was only a bed"

"Also, you there. "

Eleonore pushed her glasses, and glared at Saito.

"He-Here!"

"Starting from tomorrow, I will begin to your strict training, so that you would attain the manners of an aristocrat as soon as possible. After all, if you are really going to marry daughter of De Valliere, without some degree of proper manner, it will be hard for us to do anything. Since you don't have the foundation of family background, you'll have to make do with the foundation of your character."

"Yes, Ma'am!"

Saito gave a final salutatory bow to Eleonore. If her parents are able to recognize the relationship between two people, then there won't be any insurmountable difficulties ahead anymore.

"If you've understood that, go to bed. Right, make my room ready too."

Both of them nodded and returned to the second floor.

Eleonore, left alone again, poured some grape wine left over from the meal just now into her glass, and finished in a gulp.

Her face turned slightly red, Eleonore raised her now empty glass, and looked at it for a while.

"Ah~, where the heck, have those good men gone....."

Eleonora muttered with a muffled voice.

Saito and Louise came to the second floor, and used the room prepared for Siesta before as a temporary guest room. Mattresses were already available, so they opened the door for Eleonore to know this is the room prepared for her.

"Saito where will you be sleeping then?"

After Louise asked about it, Saito pointed to the room next door.

"I'll take this room then. There's a sofa anyway, so I'll sleep here for the night."

"Eh? That's not right."

"No problem. I've been sleeping on the floor for a long time before anyway, haven't I?"

Louise's face reddened when Saito said this.

"I'm sorry."

"Never mind that, just things of the past. So, good night then."

Just as she opened the door was just about to return to her own room, Louise suddenly pulled at the hem of Saito's shirt.

"Huh? What's going on?"

Louise seemed to be blushing very shyly while saying,

"I'd like to be alone with you for another moment."

Louise is so cute! So,Saito followed Louise's wish.

Although the room has not been used for some time, it is still spotlessly clean, it seems that Siesta and Mrs Helen have been hard at work.

A lighted magical lamp was placed on the table, faint gentle light spreading out across the room.

Louise and Saito, sat down on the couch beside the wall. Just as they sat down did Louise immediately attach herself onto Saito's body like a kitten.

There were no words sufficient to describe the blissfulness Saito was feeling.

Louise's words just now.....was still reverberating in his ears. The young girl clinging onto him now, had just said that she was willing to "dismiss the Duke's name from hers" for him.

When he first met Louise... ... he felt that she was a horrible porcupine of a person that he couldn't get along with, and now she has became his soul mate. The transformation was incredible.

Just like that, Louise leaning on him, as he thought about things, when suddenly all kinds of experiences came to mind.

"What's wrong?"

Louise snuggled up to Saito, eyes shut as she asked.

"Hmm? I just thought about a little something."

"What kind of things?"

"For 'people', if you just judge them from what you see, you can't really see the their real side. Or rather, there's something in everybody's heart that they won't express at all."

"Of course it's like that, naturally."

"Sometimes I just feel like something as 'natural' as that, is really unfathomable. It's like just now when Eleonore actually recognized our relationship, that was unbelievable."

"Yeah. However, I'm also thinking about the same thing. Getting Eleonore onee-sama's permission or something, really unbelievable. That was a first."

Everyone is hiding their true self, Saito thought.

Besides, everyone has all sorts of reasons for doing that, right.....

This time, Julio's face surfaced in Saito's mind. A Romanian priest. The annoying familiar of the Holy Pope. A handsome guy, and nobody had any idea what he was thinking .....

"But then again,"

"Hmm?"

"That Julio guy was also like that too. That guy has been keeping a stiff upper lip all this time. What a annoying guy, and even now I'm still annoyed by him."

"Yeah."

"Hey, Louise."

"What's wrong?"

"I really want to know it, the truth. I want to know what actually happened to this world. Why I came to this world. I also want to know, what I can actually do. What is right, and what is wrong. I will not run away, from all these things. I don't want to be abandoned, because I knew nothing at all, because I was a fool.

Louise said nothing and just nodded.

"So, Louise. The truths, tell me all of them. Or what you actually think. What you're thinking right now. Don't hide anything anymore, and don't care about what I think about it anymore. Because you're everything to me. Now, what you're thinking, are you hurt, are you feeling unhappy, once I start thinking about all of this, my brain just stops working. In other words, how do I put this, I just don't feeling like stopping. Because the world is spinning at an amazing rate.....It feels like, if I stop now, I will just die."

Louise stared at Saito. Then, spat out her breath with a "pooh".

"Stupid guy."

"I'm not talking nonsense."

"No, no, no. You've made a mistake, you know. I have been saying what I thought since a long time ago."

"Really?"

"Uhn. I can't hide anything from you. However, there was once I hid things from you. It was something I wanted to do, but I didn't say it. No, it's that I can't say it."

"But now, you can."

Louise nodded. Then, she showed a gentle smile.

Her smile was enough to change the atmosphere in the room. Saito immediately found it hard for him to breathe. The vague concept that was "living", suddenly had an outline and was rendered in a multitude of colors.

Louise's lips, really had the perfect shape, don't they? Saito has this sudden thought in his mind. Also, why was there such a pleasant fragrance. A fragrance that came from nowhere.

Louise slightly opened her lips. Then weaving, the magical words.

"Kiss me."

Epilogue

On a road near the border between the Tristainian and Gallian kingdoms, a party on horseback emerged. Each person wore the same style of garb resembling that of monks', with draped cloaks that made them indistinguishable from one another.

The group of travelers arrived at a site: the mountain pass. In nearby regions law and order was in great chaos, for brigands would often come here and cause trouble. It was between the countries' borders where bandits and gangs could make the most of their talents. They raided travelers crossing the border and seized their wealth. When successful, they simply escaped into the neighboring country, yet even if officers captured the criminals, the officers often found they had no authority to prosecute them [1].

As a result, merchants and travelers armed themselves to the teeth and hired bodyguards when time came to cross the border.

Although times were tough, monks were not commonly robbed. One reason may be that harming a monk would be asking for divine retribution, evoking the contempt of the Gods, but the main reason was that there was no profit to be made from robbing one.

Today, however, the feral wolves seemed especially hungry.

Just shortly after treading into a place filled with thick vegetation, the group of monks was surrounded by ten gang members. The criminals possessed all sorts of weapons, from swords to pikes, even firearms.

"Stop."

The monks, their path blocked, had no choice but to hold their horses. A man holding a sword approached, commanding everyone to dismount completely.

“Why do we have to dismount?” the leading monk asked. The bandits burst into noisy laughter.

“Naturally it’s because that thing can net us some cash!”

“In other words, you just want money, correct?” Spoken in an obviously Halkeginian language, Gallian, but with a distinct accent mixed in.

“You bet, ‘cause in order to make money, we brothers bust our asses to do business in this area.”

With a tone unfazed, a nun within the group unexpectedly responded: “Business? I’ll ask, is stealing from others like you are now doing to us your business? Have you received approval of this activity? Do you pay taxes to the government?”

The brigands heard the beautiful voice of a woman, and their eyes brightened.

“Hey, over there, let me see your face.”

The leading monk upon hearing this, held his breath.

“Stop; if you want money I’ll give it to you.”

He subsequently reached within his robes, fished out a small pouch and threw it onto the ground. A bandit pounced on it, and immediately let out a cry.

“Heavens, it’s gold sand, and so much of it.”

“Now, we would like to leave.”

The monks tried to move forward, but the brigands again blocked the way.

“Don’t worry. Us brothers are indeed hard-working, and our style is to grab everything we can get a hold of. Leave us your horses, and the woman too.”

“I refuse.”

“There’s no choice. I guess we’ll just help ourselves."

The bandit walked towards whom he suspected was the nun.

“Let me see; what kind of goods do you really have?”

Just as he attempted to place his hand on the woman, the monk leader gravely warned the bandit.

“If you dare touch her cloak, you will die. You only live once, so I advise you if you still treasure your life.”

The brigands went hysterical.

“Prove you monks will be able to catch us!”

The bandit used a pointed end (of his weapon **(!)**) to ruffle the nun’s cloak. Underneath the cloth, there appeared a woman’s face with the beauty of a fairy.

“Woah, this girl will sell for a high price!”

Every brigand had a cheerful expression.

“I gotta say, have you killed people before?”

Next to the nun, one monk, who up until now had said nothing, asked suddenly.

“Oh yeah. About once a month or so, hmm?”

As he was speaking, the bandit pulled the cloak off the nun entirely.

“ . . . Huh?”

When he saw what had previously been hidden under the cloak, the man’s thoughts numbed.

Long ears . . . not a human trait. Oh, right, this characteristic belongs to a certain race . . .

What is it?

Supposedly, they’re a people both strong and beautiful . . .

It’s a pity that man couldn't come to a final conclusion because a branch flew noiselessly into his chest.

“They’re elves!” the member with the pike cried out.

The monk leader . . . Ali, repeated the incantation.

“Oh forest branches, become arrows sharp, enemies will cry, through their bodies fly.” [2].

Responding to the spell, a nearby branch snapped off like a toothpick and became a high speed arrow aimed at the bandit who just shouted. The arrow launched into his mouth and emerged from the base of his skull (cervical vertebrae, back neck area).

The two brigands who held fire guns . . . aimed at the elves and pulled their triggers.

Defending both sides Luctiana, the gracefully postured elf, had long been preparing a spell.

“Oh wind and air, heed my call, a shield around me, form a wall.” [3].

The air shield received and deflected the bullets, flicking them far away with a loud pop. Upon seeing this, the brigands scattered, fleeing in all directions.

“El---elves are here!”

Ali shook his head somewhat disapprovingly (sadly? disappointed?).

“Oh forest branches long, reach to bind my foes strong.” [4].

Numerous outstretched branches coiled around the hands and feet of the brigands.

The rest of the sharp arrow branches flew around, homing in on the brigands’ throats or their stomachs in order to stab them.

After a few brief seconds, all was quiet once again. Using the same skill demonstrated in manipulating the branches, Ali moved the corpses into the deepest part of the forest, and soon after he again used earth magic to quickly bury the bodies.

When he was done with everything, Ali began to reprimand Luctiana.

“I tell you Luctiana! What were you thinking back there? How can someone ask those kind of questions?!”

In contrast, Luctiana looked like she could care less.

“Wha? If we have questions, no matter what we go and ask them; that’s our duty as scholars.”

“Really! Even if someone happens to be a savage murder, taking his life doesn’t make me feel warm and fuzzy inside.”

“Ok, next time I’ll be more careful.”

“For goodness’ sake, you have to. If we’re traveling by sea, we really wouldn’t have so much trouble, right? I’m not saying land travel is time-consuming, but it’s still very dangerous!”

“Well, think: if we came by sea, there wouldn’t be anything to sightsee along the way. A trip where we constantly stare at the unchanging water surface; I can only imagine the insufferable horror. A big ocean is even more boring than a desert.”

Luctiana spoke without reservation, and a male elf next to her laughed.

“So at this rate, we’ll never figure out who’ll be the team leader. Ali, Your Highness.”

“What do you mean, Edolis? **(!)** Without a doubt, Luctiana is the team leader here. We are merely servants accompanying Miss High and Mighty on her journey.”

Ali now finished with his bitter words, Luctiana once again yelled excitedly,

“Awesome! This lady can boss you around! Glorious people of the desert, we are the noble, chosen race responsible for protecting the world. Onwards! Objective: Kingdom of Tristainia, Des, Des, Des . . .”

The name was on the tip of her tongue.

“It’s Des Ornières,”

Ali rushed to inform her.

“Seriously . . . the names these barbarians come up with are real tongue twisters; doesn’t matter if they’re names of a person or a place.”

“Aren’t you a scholar?” Ali couldn’t help but ask.

Listening, Edolis **(!)** and another elf beside him, Matalf **(!)**, started laughing together.

The desert elves, having covered themselves with their cloaks, followed the open road and traveled onwards.